

## Allen, Juliet (PS/SP)

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**From:** Kubicek, Brett (PS/SP)  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 26, 2017 12:44 PM  
**To:** Corbeil, Alexander (PS/SP)  
**Subject:** RE: Event Notes  
**Attachments:** report canada internet.docx

Great stuff – thank you! Now key next bit is that I'd like some help pulling together more precise ideas about what kinds of processes (individual, group, community) are relevant to consider.

This line of yours below is a great example of what I have in mind:

- (**Note:** Question becomes how to ensure potential members do not follow into the depths of IS Telegram accounts, what role for messaging in countering this progression?)

Examples would be the three dynamics listed in the attached ICSR paper.

Or the 'who matters online' paper by Berger a while back, plus his more recent arguments on

Also thinking about the ideas in the 'cyber psych' paper ([http://tsas.ca/tsas\\_library\\_entry/tsas-wp16-05-assessment-of-the-state-of-knowledge-connections-between-research-on-the-social-psychology-of-the-internet-and-violent-extremism/](http://tsas.ca/tsas_library_entry/tsas-wp16-05-assessment-of-the-state-of-knowledge-connections-between-research-on-the-social-psychology-of-the-internet-and-violent-extremism/)), such as the formation of certain kinds of identity groups, along with examples from Lorne and Amar's recent work. The Vidino paper here (<http://carleton.ca/npsia/research/working-papers/>) would have some as well, along with ISD's One-to-One, or Moonshot/Jigsaw work (trying to catch early searching, etc.).

In short, it would be great to have a bit of a list (incomplete for now to be sure!), of some examples of what one would be trying to accomplish, such as 'to ensure potential members do not follow...'

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**From:** Corbeil, Alexander (PS/SP)  
**Sent:** Wednesday, January 25, 2017 2:23 PM  
**To:** Kubicek, Brett (PS/SP)  
**Subject:** Event Notes

Hey Brett,

Here are my notes regarding the event we discussed.

The event's goals are as follows: 1) Describe terrorist messaging capabilities and associated challenges 2) Measure the effectiveness of allied efforts 3) Share best practices in messaging.

Defining the Problem:

- Context:
  - o Ease of access to terrorist messaging and propaganda: the globalization of real-time terrorist facilitation/financing, incitement/inspiration, training and planning.
  - o A professionalization of extremist content online, enabled by the proliferation and reduce in cost of professional quality camera, sound and editing equipment; also the presence of Western and other "foreign fighters" who have both the technological knowhow and cultural/linguistic relevance related to their target audiences.

- Growing understanding of user security on mobile devices, encryption and general security awareness.
- Interconnectivity and utility of different platforms, leveraged by extremists to convey their messages and coordinate.
- A malleable environment, in which terrorist actors can easily move from one or more platforms to another, more permissive platform(s).
- A shift by terrorist organizations to encrypted platforms, such as Telegram and WhatsApp, which create additional difficulties for surveillance, interception and counter-messaging.
- Changing real world environment, with the Islamic State under pressure in Iraq and Syria how will communication/propaganda initiatives and networks change? Incitement to violence at home likely to increase, with foreign fighter flows greatly diminished.
- Spread of production and dissemination techniques pioneered or greatly improved upon by the Islamic State to other similar organizations – Al Qaeda Central, Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, Al Shabaab, Boko Haram etc.
- Open Source Jihad: creation of extremist material not only by centralized and affiliated terrorist group media hubs, but by individual activists who create supportive/inciting materials in a number of languages.
- Different narratives promoted by radical groups, not only the Islamic State, that are place, culture, issue, ideology and event specific.
- Counter Messaging:
  - Does counter messaging work?
  - Difficulties assessing the impact, the goal is to dissuade individuals from being radicalized/joining an organization/carrying out an attack. Difficult to measure events/actions that didn't take place as a result of counter messaging.
  - Difficulties around a concerted counter messaging strategy among government agencies/departments in the same country, let alone between countries or among member states of international organizations. This is not to mention other similar difficulties in public-private partnerships.
  - No agreed upon strategies/metrics/prominent public initiatives focused on determining the effectiveness of counter messaging campaigns/programs.
  - Countries, their institutions and partners are much slower to react to terrorist content than terrorist groups create and disseminate content. Because of this and changing geo-political/conflict/other circumstances terrorist narratives, messaging strategies and dissemination tactics change rapidly: Counter messaging needs to become more nimble and proactive/reactive.
  - Lack of credibility among target audience(s) regarding both government and their counter-messaging partners: what should the role of government be in counter messaging? Which partners are to be chosen? What does credibility look like?
  - Mishandling of previous counter-messaging campaigns. (ex. Think Again Turn Away): what are the lessons learned and how can they be applied to future initiatives?

#### Ongoing Efforts:

- US Department of State Global Engagement Center (Global Engagement Center)
  - Replaced the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, charged with coordinating US counterterrorism messaging to foreign audiences.
  - Focused on "partner-driven messaging and data analytics"
  - Partners include: NGOs, schools, young people, social/civil society leadership, religious leadership, governments and others
  - Leverages data analytics to understand dynamics, guide and inform messaging efforts and measure effectiveness
  - Develop and procure unbranded content that is made available to global partners
  - Interagency engagement: US national security agencies that operate in the information space
- Private Sector Engagement in Responding to the Use of the Internet and ICT for Terrorist Purposes (ICT4Peace and UNCTED).

- An attempt to establish guidelines for private-public partnerships in addressing the availability of extremist content online; includes the develop of tools and mechanisms to counter terrorist and violent extremist narratives.
- Findings and guidelines from which will be presented to the Security Council, likely this year.
- UK and Swiss Governments, supported by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue and Democratic Control of Armed Forces, have sought to review government best practices. (Global Counterterrorism Forum)
  - Efforts focus on communications (challenge the appeal of propaganda) and co-governance (limit the availability and accessibility of propaganda online)
  - Outcomes document, including recommendations and next steps to be submitted March 2017 and include:
    - Impact – better understand the impact of efforts in countering and removing propaganda
    - Scale –takedown measures and counter narrative programs are too slow, operate at too small of a scale to effectively challenge propaganda (see Samir Kassir Foundation study below)
    - Future – the threat of terrorism is diversifying and technology is evolving, need to change/adapt communications and be forward looking. ( **Note:** While the threat of other groups using such technology is diversifying, it's also just starting to be focused on now that the Islamic State is losing ground. Studies such as those on Telegram and other platforms/online strategies by other groups are important here)
- UN currently developing a comprehensive framework on CVE strategic communications with a focus on counter narratives (UNCTITE)
  - Proposal to be presented at the Security Council April 12, 2017.

#### Measuring Effectiveness:

- Leveraging social media platform analytics to follow the reach and resonance of counter-messaging initiatives/conducting qualitative and quantitative studies of response to the counter-messaging campaign (Extreme Dialogue Report).
  - Tracking both quantitative and qualitative measurements to ensure not only that the initiative is reaching a large audience, but that it is also reaching and resonating with the appropriate audience.
  - Incorporating both positive and negative perceptions of the counter-messaging campaign into best practices (can be done by analyzing comments on social media and those related to news articles/stories/information about the campaign).
  - Creating a feedback loop in order to constantly improve counter-messaging narratives, engagement strategies, distribution patterns, and the use of advertising funds, where applicable.
  - Overcoming hesitation and unwillingness of counter-messaging organizations/creators to measure the effectiveness of these initiatives.
- Producing on-the-ground/offline studies to measure the reach and resonance of counter-messaging initiatives (Samir Kassir Foundation) – ( )
  - The tangible impact of counter-messaging must also be quantitatively and qualitatively measured. While resources are put towards the creation of counter-messaging, not enough is done to measure the effectiveness of such initiatives. Furthermore, engaging with at-risk communities (the target audience) can also set the foundation for/feed into effective campaigns.
  - The study Reception and Perception of Radical Messages involved interviews with Sunni individuals from communities in Lebanon deemed most at risk of radicalization and with Syrian refugees living near Beirut.
  - Finding #5: “the potent production value of radical messages was more pronounced when compared to counter-radical messaging as the content is more attractive than the messages preaching true religiosity, moderation and tolerance because the style and tone of the moderate messages are highly boring and monotonous.”

s.19(1)

- Finding #8: "For counter-radical messages to be effective they need to be much more frequently and consistently produced, as is the case with radical material...In addition, counter-radical messages must involve local, trust-worthy, moderate authorities."

#### Counter Messaging:

- Counter messaging can take a number of forms and have varying levels of success, depending on strategic approach and execution.
- Counter messaging must also be built upon a foundation of effective best practices and collected information (see above and below):
- Counterspeech (Susan Benesch and Derek Ruths: Considerations for Successful Counterspeech)
  - Counterspeech, defined as a response that takes issue with hateful, harmful or extremist content, has proven in some contexts to be useful in changing immediate online behavior of hateful users on Twitter.
  - This is particularly true in one-on-one engagements in which the engager used an empathetic/kind tone, images and humour. Identifying the speech as hateful, but not the user. Many-to-many initiatives can also have a positive impact, hijacking hateful/dangerous hashtags, but not necessarily changing the attitudes of the hateful users.
  - Other approaches, such as one-to-many and many-to-one counterspeech do not seem to result in the same constructive impact.
- Evaluating Methods to Diminish Expressions of Hatred and Extremism Online (Susan Benesch)
  - The use of an automated scraping technology to pull down hateful/dangerous speech and counterspeech from Twitter, via keywords and hashtags.
  - Goal was to understand what sort of counterspeech is effective against hateful/dangerous speech across different contexts.
  - The scraping tool used on Twitter can be applied on that platform to pull down Islamic State and terrorist group content in order to both understanding current messaging techniques/patterns/narratives and provide information of use to quickly developing counternarratives/counter messaging for Twitter
  - Similar technology can be leveraged against other platforms with an API and which allow the governments and their partners to do so.
  - Such automated processes should be improved to help enhance the collection and identification abilities around hate/dangerous speech and counterspeech.
- IS and the Jihadist Information Highway: Projecting Influence and Religious Identity via Telegram (Nico Prucha, Perspectives on Terrorism)
  - Telegram the primary hub for dispatching new content since early 2016
  - IS presents itself, in Arabic, as an Arab movement fighting for independence, composed of modern-day Islamic warriors/defenders of Sunni communities. Foreign fighters convey their religious reasons for joining to individuals in their home countries.
  - The West has employed half-hearted counter-narratives that usually neither touch upon the Arabic propaganda content, nor the messages conveyed by non-Arab foreign fighters, who explain their reasons for joining the cause in their own words.
  - Telegram is now the main hub for IS to share content from other platforms and as a staging ground to share content to/coordinate "media raids" on other platforms. Twitter and Facebook accounts are published on Telegram, content from which is brought into Telegram: incite and recruit new members. (Note: Question becomes how to ensure potential members do not follow into the depths of IS Telegram accounts, what role for messaging in countering this progression?)
  - Counter narratives need to engage religious discourses, as religion is one of the central elements in IS' efforts to recruit and radicalize. There is a need to deconstruct the theology of violence inherent in jihadi communications and practice.
- Studying ISIS-related Activities on Telegram (Derek Ruths)
  - Ruths studied the early stage adoption of the Telegram platform by the Islamic State by scraping, categorizing and analyzing content from English language IS-related accounts
  - While not comprehensive, the study highlights a few things:

- Telegram can be scraped for valuable content which can be used to guide counter messaging
- Such scraping can be applied to a much larger data set and across languages, given the appropriate expertise for both.
- Forward looking studies, such as this one, can be done not only on Telegram but many other platforms to which IS and other groups are active on/will migrate to.

#### Recommendations Going Forward:

- Facilitate effective inter-government, multilateral, and private-public partnerships in the facilitation, creation, dissemination and tracking of online counter-messaging campaigns.
  - o This includes defining the role(s) of government and the elements of such effective partnerships.
  - o Increase the agility of these relationships and the production and dissemination of counter messaging products.
- Incorporate tracking measurements and initiatives to highlight the reach and resonance of counter-messaging campaigns, creating a feedback loop for product improvement and the establishment of best practices.
- Engage with target communities, both to understand the reach and resonance of counter-messaging and to inform future initiatives, and to suggest core elements/facets of counter-messaging campaigns.
- Incorporate forward thinking analysis in an attempt to predict and adapt counter messaging to the rapidly changing environment (inclusive of a shift to new platforms, new messaging techniques and new message content/narratives).

Let me know if you'd like to discuss any of this in person, might be able to come up with some additional points during a conversation.

Best,

Alx

## **Peers over Propaganda: Online Radicalisation among British Foreign Fighters**

*By Nick Kaderbhai, Shiraz Maher, and Peter Neumann*

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### **Introduction**

The impact of online communication on processes of radicalisation has been vigorously debated for years. Extremist groups were among the first and most enthusiastic adopters of the internet – a medium which they believed was free of government control and censorship, allowing for their unfiltered message to be heard by supporters and sympathisers all over the world.<sup>1</sup> Nowadays, there is practically no extremist group that doesn't have an online presence – though their activities vary in degree and sophistication.<sup>2</sup>

Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict in 2011, jihadist groups are widely thought to have broken new ground. Their use of social media is believed to be massive and sophisticated. For 'Islamic State', it has come to be seen as a central and distinctive feature of its modus operandi, helping the group intimidate and manipulate their enemies, as well as radicalize and recruit potential supporters.<sup>3</sup> It is the latter – the role of online communications in radicalization and recruitment - that is the subject of this report. What impact does social media have on wannabe foreign fighters from Western countries? How do they use the internet, and – most importantly – what makes them join up?

In much of the recent media coverage, the Islamic State's online campaign is presented as strongly coordinated and centrally organized, reaching a global audience through high end video

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Neumann, *Countering Online Radicalization in America* (Washington DC: Bipartisan Policy Center, 2012), pp. 15-17; available at <http://bipartisanpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/default/files/BPC%20Online%20Radicalization%20Report.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> See Gabriel Weimann, *New Terrorism and New Media* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, 2014); available at [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/STIP\\_140501\\_new\\_terrorism\\_F.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/STIP_140501_new_terrorism_F.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Rose Powell, 'Cats and Kalashnikovs: Behind the ISIL social media strategy', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 June 2014; Steve Rose, 'The Isis propaganda war: a hi-tech media jihad', *Guardian*, 7 October 2014; Scott Shane and Ben Hubbard, 'ISIS Displaying a Deft Command of Varied Media', *New York Times*, 30 August 2014.

productions and sophisticated Twitter campaigns.<sup>4</sup> The impression created is that of a group of skillful manipulators brainwashing their helpless subjects into becoming supporters of Islamic State and, ultimately, making their way to Syria. Yet much of the research that members of our team have conducted points in different directions:

- An earlier ICSR report uncovered the role of 'disseminators' and 'cheerleaders' – online activists who are often Western based and have no formal ties to Islamic State;<sup>5</sup>
- Twitter campaigns generate less interest than is commonly believed,<sup>6</sup>
- Online propaganda alone rarely creates the kind of commitment that turns sympathisers into actual recruits.<sup>7</sup>

In short, none of our earlier findings support the notion of top-down recruitment that so often dominates the news coverage.

### Approach

In trying to resolve the contradiction between conventional wisdom and our own, earlier empirical findings, we took a radically different approach from existing reports on the Islamic State and social media. Unlike everyone else, the principal focus of our investigation was not the Islamic State's online campaign – which we believe has been given an excessive amounts of coverage – but the recruits themselves.

In other words, we were not so much interested in what Islamic State *put out*, but – rather – what the wannabe fighters *took in*. We wanted to understand how they use the internet, and what parts of the internet, if any, caused them to join up. In doing so, what we sought to avoid was the kind of circular logic whereby researchers focus on the Islamic State's social media campaign, ignore everything else, and – then – conclude that it must have been the social media campaign that prompted people to join.

The reason we were able to do this is the groundbreaking primary research that ICSR has conducted on Syrian foreign fighters. Starting in 2012, we have now collected nearly 700 online

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Aya Batrawy, 'ISIS Outpaces Arab Governments in Social Media War', *Associated Press*, 21 September 2014; Patrick Kingsley, 'Who is behind ISIS's terrifying online propaganda operation?', *Guardian*, 23 June 2014; Shiv Malik and Sandra Laville, 'Isis in duel with Twitter and YouTube to spread extremist propaganda', *Guardian*, 24 September 2014; Charlotte Meredith, 'ISIS YouTube Video', *Huffington Post*, 26 June 2014; Shane and Hubbard, 'ISIS Displaying', op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Carter, Shiraz Maher, and Peter R. Neumann, *#Greenbirds: Measuring Importance and Influence in Syrian Foreign Fighter Networks* (London: ICSR, 2014); available at <http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/ICSR-Report-Greenbirds-Measuring-Importance-and-Influence-in-Syrian-Foreign-Fighter-Networks.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Shiraz Maher and Joseph Carter, 'Analyzing the ISIS Twitter Storm', *War on the Rocks*, 24 June 2014; available at <http://warontherocks.com/2014/06/analyzing-the-isis-twitter-storm/>.

<sup>7</sup> Ali Fisher and Nico Prucha, 'ISIS Is Winning the Online Jihad Against the West', *Daily Beast*, 1 October 2014; available at <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/10/01/isis-is-winning-the-online-jihad-against-the-west.html>.

social media profiles of Western citizens or residents who have gone to Syria and Iraq to join Sunni militant groups, mainly Jabhat al Nusra and, especially, the Islamic State. In addition, we have communicated with nearly 100 active fighters – in some cases repeatedly and over the course of several months – and carried out fieldwork in the Turkish region from where most of them enter Syria.

The use of Palantir, a powerful analytics platform, enabled us to make sense of this data and generate a small sample of 10 male British fighters for whom we possess sufficient online data for the period before their departure in order to understand their personal trajectories of radicalisation and recruitment. It is those fighters whose Tweets, comments, and Facebook comments will feature prominently in the main part of this report.

## Findings

What we found was new in some respects – and not so new in others:

- *THE PAINS OF INACTION*: One of the novelties is the impact of **massive amounts of conflict-related, often highly emotional, content** that wannabe fighters are now exposed to. As extremists have populated mainstream platforms, especially Twitter, it is no longer possible – or necessary – to separate between ‘moderate’, radical and extremist sources. For many of the Western fighters, the sustained (and cumulative) effect seems to have been an overwhelming feeling of guilt – an emotional pain based on the stark contrast between one’s own comfort and the enormous suffering and injustices experienced by one’s ‘brothers and sisters’ in Syria.
- *FIGHTING COMMUNITIES*: Another new phenomenon is the **direct virtual contact between wannabes and active fighters** on the frontlines. In contrast to previous conflicts, supporters are no longer limited to watching videos and reading statements but can interact with fighters in real time through platforms like Facebook, Ask.fm, Twitter, and private messaging applications. This means that fighters and wannabes can form virtual social communities, build trust and commitment, and – especially where wannabes and active fighters knew each other previously – create a powerful sense of moral and personal obligation to join the fight.
- *ON AND OFFLINE*: What’s not new is the **interplay between on- and offline interactions** which has occurred in a majority of the cases we have examined. The internet may help to facilitate contacts and provide inspiration, but people’s *actual* decision to go and their subsequent transfer into Syria tends to be preceded by a significant amount of face to face interaction. This is important for the wannabe fighters who require strong, personal bonds to become involved in ‘high risk activism’, but it is equally important for the militant groups who want applicants to provide ‘references’, also known as *tazkya*.

## Structure



Our findings go against conventional wisdom. Based on our research, it was peers – not propaganda – that convinced the British fighters in our sample to go to Syria. The social media campaigns of militant groups like Islamic State may have been important but not decisive.

This does not mean that the internet didn't matter. Open-source, widely accessible content contributed to people's sense of guilt and helplessness. Virtual contacts with active fighters made them have a stake and, in many cases, created a strong sense of social obligation. Ultimately, however, it wasn't the online environment as such – but the extent to which it created peer to peer contacts – that facilitated the decision to go.

The report begins with a chapter contrasting the Islamic State's social media campaign with the ways in which British foreign fighters have *actually* used online communications. This is followed by three small chapters describing the key dynamics and processes that we believe are significant: the first deals with the 'pains of action' caused by the prolonged exposure to, and involvement with, conflict related content; the second looks at 'fighting communities' involving wannabe and actual fighters; and, finally, we examine the back and forth between on- and offline communications that tends to precede, and facilitate, the decision to go to Syria.

We are confident that our report makes an important contribution to the fast evolving field of research on online radicalisation. It builds on, and develops, long-established notions like Doug McAdam's 'high risk activism'<sup>8</sup> and Marc Sageman's 'sense of moral outrage',<sup>9</sup> while rejecting the increasingly popular idea that it is the internet – and the internet alone – that radicalizes people. To paraphrase Mark Juergensmeyer, the internet is not *the* problem, but aspects of it may well be problematic.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Doug McAdam, 'Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer', *American Journal of Sociology*, 92(1) (1986), pp. 64-90.

<sup>9</sup> Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. 73-6.

<sup>10</sup> See Mark Juergensmeyer, 'Religion as a Cause of Terrorism' in Louise Richardson (ed.), *The Roots of Terrorism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 133-144.

## Islamic State vs. Wannabe Fighters

The social media campaigns of jihadist groups in the Syrian/Iraqi conflict are extensive – but are they also effective? Many experts and commentators believe that – based on size and sophistication alone – they *must* be good at recruiting people. They describe in glowing terms Islamic State's 'really effective brand strategy',<sup>11</sup> its 'planning and professionalism',<sup>12</sup> the 'cinematic quality' of its videos,<sup>13</sup> and how the group 'is using every contemporary mode of messaging to recruit fighters'.<sup>14</sup> The assumption is that online exposure – and online exposure alone – makes people join.

The only problem: there is no evidence to support this claim; no information on how wannabe fighters are *actually* using the internet; and no discussion of what other influences may have caused them to go to Syria.

This chapter offers two perspectives on jihadist internet use in the Syrian/Iraqi conflict. One is top-down: the Islamic State's online campaign which – we are constantly told – is successful at recruiting foreign fighters. The other is bottom up: the use of the internet by fighters and wannabe fighters themselves. What emerges is a stark contrast: while the Islamic State's social media campaign is indeed massive and sophisticated, it is not as top down and centrally coordinated as often alleged, nor does most of it impact on wannabe foreign fighters during the process of joining up.

### How the Islamic State Uses the Internet

The purpose of the Islamic State's social media campaign is to *intimidate* and to *inspire*.<sup>15</sup> Regarding intimidation, the Islamic State has proven to be powerful and innovative, be it by communicating threats, demoralizing Western audiences, or by 'sowing terror, disunion, and defection' among its enemies. There is evidence, for example, that the group's military offensive in the summer of 2014 was coordinated with its social media efforts, forcing populations to flee their villages and compelling Iraqi soldiers to abandon their positions out of fear they might be caught, tortured and executed.<sup>16</sup>

Less clear is the extent to which the Islamic State's social media campaign has succeeded at making people join. This is not for lack of trying. The Islamic State produces more 'inspirational' output than other jihadist groups and has been the only one to consistently target

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<sup>11</sup> Sam Thielman, 'ISIS' Sinister Media Strategy', *AdWeek*, 10 September 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Kingsley, 'Who Is Behind', op. cit.

<sup>13</sup> Spencer Ackerman, 'ISIS Online Propaganda Outpacing U.S. Counter-efforts, Ex-Officials Warn', *Guardian*, 22 September 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Shane and Hubbard, 'ISIS Displaying', op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> Alessandro Bonzio, 'ISIS' use of social media isn't surprising: its digital strategy is', *Huffington Post*, 15 September 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Emerson Brooking, 'The ISIS Propaganda Machine Is Horrifying and Effective: How Does It Work?', *Defense in Depth*, Council on Foreign Relations, 31 December 2014; available at <http://blogs.cfr.org/davidson/2014/12/31/best-of-2014-the-isis-propaganda-machine-is-horrifying-and-effective-how-does-it-work/>. Also George Packer, 'A Friend Flees the Horror of ISIS', *The New Yorker*, 6 August 2014.

Western audiences in their own, European languages. All of this output is professionally made and well presented, demonstrating members' skill at using the latest equipment, editing and graphic software.<sup>17</sup> Al Hayat Media Centre, one of the group's media production entities, has released a whole range of media products, including feature length documentaries like *Flames of War*; shorter videos highlighting the foreigners' 'good works'; interviews with Western fighters; translations of Arabic language content; and – not least – the group's online magazine Dabiq which has been published in half a dozen languages.<sup>18</sup>

Another striking facet is the group's dissemination strategy. The Islamic State maintains multiple accounts on practically every major social media platform, including Facebook, Instagram, and Ask.fm. On Twitter, it is represented by various parts of the leadership, provincial commands, and hundreds of individual fighters who maintain their own, personal accounts.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the group has repeatedly 'hijacked' popular hashtags (for example, '#WorldCup') and created automatized fake accounts to promote its own (for instance, '#AllEyesonISIS'). For a brief period, it even had its own Android app – *Dawn of Glad Tidings* – through which it sent messages via subscribers' Twitter accounts.<sup>20</sup> The cumulative effect is both practical and psychological. It enables the Islamic State to swamp the internet, making takedowns more difficult and less effective, while at the same time 'magnifying' the group's message and creating the perception of momentum and strength.<sup>21</sup>

What's more, the group is conscious that it has multiple audiences who need to be reached and spoken to differently. Pictures of executions or military victories are used to increase the group's visibility and create a sense of shock and terror among non-jihadist audiences, while sympathizers are additionally exposed to 'softer' messages articulating the idea of an Islamic utopia. Potential recruits, therefore, will see the group's excessively violent side but also pictures of foreign fighters distributing food, adjudicating disputes, manning local police forces, or – indeed – holding kittens and showing off pots of Nutella.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, content and messages are segmented according to language, often incorporating local references and featuring 'role models' from the respective countries and/or language groups at which they are targeted.<sup>23</sup> This system of customization, along with its capabilities in production and dissemination, are indicative of the group's sophistication – resulting in a campaign that, in the words of J.M. Berger, 'would put American social media marketing gurus to shame'.<sup>24</sup>

### *Cheerleaders, Disseminators, and Fanboys*

<sup>17</sup> Kingsley 'Who is behind', op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> See Olivia Becker, 'ISIS has a really slick and sophisticated media department', *Vice News*, 12 July 2014; 'New ISIS Media Company Addresses English, German, and French Speaking Westerners', *MEMRI*, 23 June 2014.

<sup>19</sup> For a sample of Islamic State related Twitter accounts and activity, see Erin M. Saltman and Charlie Winter, *Islamic State: The Changing Face of Modern Jihadism* (London: Quilliam, 2014), pp. 66-70.

<sup>20</sup> JM Berger, 'How ISIS Games Twitter', *The Atlantic*, 16 June 2014. See also Alessandro Bonzio, 'ISIS' use of social media isn't surprising: its digital strategy is', *Huffington Post*, 15 September 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Berger, 'How ISIS Games', op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Berger, 'How ISIS Games', op. cit.

This is not to say, however, that the group's entire online presence is top down and centrally coordinated. In our #Greenbirds report, we showed that the most influential spiritual authorities among Western foreign fighters had no formal association with Islamic State or other jihadist groups, nor were they located in Syria or Iraq (one was based in the United States, the other was Australian). They served as spiritual 'cheerleaders' who had taken it upon themselves to promote and justify the idea of foreign fighting, typically through the internet, and emerged as important – albeit wholly independent – sources of influence.<sup>25</sup>

Our report also highlighted the role of so-called 'disseminators' who are key to pushing the groups' messages to their Western recipients. Among the Western foreign fighters in our database, the most popular Twitter accounts were not the groups' official accounts (none of them even made it into the Top 10), but those of independent disseminators like 'Shami Witness' who were broadly supportive of the Islamic State, justified its actions and re-tweeted its material, but also produced their own output (for example, memes), promoted unorthodox sources of information, and – occasionally – disagreed with the party line.<sup>26</sup> Seven years ago, Jarret Brachman coined the term 'jihobbyist' to describe such individuals, recognizing that, in a vast, growing and seemingly anarchical structure like the internet, they were essential to '[moving] forward the Jihadist agenda'.<sup>27</sup>

Not least, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of so-called 'fanboys' – enthusiastic supporters of the Islamic State who populate Facebook and Twitter and spend considerable amounts of time discussing the latest developments and re-tweeting the pictures, memes and other material published by fighters and disseminators. Communicating with other, seemingly more prominent members gives them a sense of being part of the movement and having a role to play – even if their direct involvement with jihadist groups is minimal. Like the cheerleaders and disseminators, they are supporters, not members, and they receive no explicit direction. Yet their contribution is essential to making the group visible and effective. Acting like a swarm, they are what ICSR research fellow Nico Prucha called the 'media mujahideen'.<sup>28</sup>

### How Wannabe Fighters Use the Internet

For our analysis of how wannabe fighters use the internet, we examined the online postings of the 10 British fighters in our sample between the first time they had publicly contemplated the idea of going to Syria and their eventual departure. We didn't, therefore, look at their entire radicalisation trajectory (many had, in fact, been involved in extremist causes long before the Syrian conflict) but narrowly focused on *the process of joining up*,<sup>29</sup> which could last from a few weeks to several months. Our data consisted of Tweets and Facebook posts – in some cases also

<sup>25</sup> Carter, #Greenbirds, op cit., pp. 18-28.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 15-18.

<sup>27</sup> Jarret Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 19.

<sup>28</sup> Ali Fisher and Nico Prucha, 'ISIS is winning the online jihad against the West', *Daily Beast*, 1 October 2014.

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of concepts like 'recruitment' and 'joining up' in the context of jihadist radicalisation, see Peter R. Neumann, 'Joining Al-Qaeda: Jihadist Recruitment in Europe', *Adelphi Paper #399, International Institute for Strategic Studies*, January 2009.

blog and Ask.fm entries – which we studied with a view to understanding their use of online platforms, behaviors, interactions, and changes in attitude.

For this section, we aimed to create a first – and, arguably, very broad – impression of how the wannabe fighters in our sample have used the internet. To understand change and innovation, we compared our empirical findings to earlier research about jihadist online behavior. Crucially, we then looked for evidence of potential crossovers between fighters' use of the internet and the online campaigns of jihadist groups like the Islamic State. The result is a first sketch of wannabe foreign fighters' online ecosystem which – in our view – consists of three pillars: use of open platforms; personal outreach; and 'fanboy socialization'.

### *Open Platforms*

Our first observation is wannabe fighters' widespread use of open, mainstream platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and – more recently - Telegram. All the wannabe fighters in our sample had such accounts which they used extensively to discuss political and religious issues, as well as their attitudes towards the conflict, Western society, and the idea of making *hijra* (that is, going to Syria).<sup>30</sup> The openness of these platforms didn't deter them. At the time of observation, even sensitive discussions were frequently conducted via unlocked Twitter accounts, and Facebook pages remained relatively open (though this may have changed in recent months). In this respect, the British wannabes in our sample were typical of many Western fighters who maintain accounts on at least one of the platforms.

The use of open platforms stands in marked contrast to earlier periods when the majority of jihadist sympathizers populated stand-alone websites, so-called 'forums'. The forums were often password-protected, and people had to be introduced by existing members or spend considerable periods gaining 'credibility' in order to gain access to closed discussions.<sup>31</sup> The move to open platforms has lowered the threshold to becoming involved in the jihadist milieu. Wannabes no longer need to seek out forums and subject themselves to a complex process of admission. They are able to 'dabble' in jihadist discussions without having to fully commit to the cause, or confront potentially troubling questions about legality which signing up to a closed forum might raise.

Another consequence is that wannabe fighters are exposed to a wider range of material, allowing for greater eclecticism and, by definition, reducing the relative impact of any one particular source. Among the memes, pictures, articles, and videos that wannabe jihadists posted on their accounts was output from mainstream television channels, non-jihadist religious sources, NGO's, and think tanks. What's more, the explicitly jihadist content originated with fighters,

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<sup>30</sup> The concept of *hijra* relates to the Prophet Mohammed's journey from Mecca to Medina, and is frequently invoked by jihadists to justify (and mandate) the migration to a foreign land where Muslims face injustice or oppression. See xxx

<sup>31</sup> For an overview of the jihadist discussion forum 'scene', see Mohammed Ali Musawi, *Cheering for Osama: How Jihadists Use Internet Discussion Forums* (London: Quilliam, 2010), esp. Chapter 1; available at <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/cheering-for-osama-how-jihadists-use-the-internet-forums.pdf>.

disseminators, religious 'cheerleaders', and other fanboys – not only jihadist groups and their media production entities. This doesn't mean that wannabe fighters can easily be swayed or influenced: the material they disseminate tends to reinforce their jihadist worldview – whatever the source. But it demonstrates that material produced by jihadist groups like Islamic State is not their only source of information, nor does it seem to have an exceptionally strong impact.

### *Personal Outreach*

Another important characteristic of wannabes' online behavior is attempts to reach out to foreign fighters in Syria or Iraq. From the wannabes' perspective, being in direct communication with fighters on the ground is an exciting way of learning about the conflict; it enables them to take part in the life of people they identify with; and it represents a first-hand source of information about how to get to Syria. The fighters in our sample used different methods for getting in touch with fighters. Some did so openly, through Tweets or by posting on fighters' Facebook pages. Others used Ask.fm, which allows for questions to be asked anonymously, or requested fighters to connect via private messaging services (such as KiK and Whatsapp) and Twitter's direct message function.

The ability to communicate with fighters is a relatively recent phenomenon. In earlier periods, wannabes used to be limited to hanging out in forums, talking to each other and consuming the latest news and videos from the frontlines. Early *jihobbyists* such as Younis Tsouli ('Irhabi007') gained prominence because they were seen as 'being close' to groups like al Qaeda in Iraq, though everyone realized they weren't members and hadn't ever stepped into a conflict zone.<sup>32</sup> Anwar al Awlaki, the radical preacher who made it his mission to incite homegrown 'lone wolves' in the late 2000s, was the first major jihadist figure to cultivate fanboys through his blog.<sup>33</sup> The first actual fighter to communicate with wannabes on a regular basis was Omar Hammami, an American who had joined al Shabab in Somalia, but his outreach efforts were isolated, erratic and, ultimately, short-lived.<sup>34</sup>

It remains unclear to what extent the communication between Syria wannabes and fighters is directed by jihadist groups and whether, therefore, the personal outreach is a deliberate and organized part of their social media campaigns. While it seems clear that many groups regard fighters' personal social media activity as desirable, we are confident that most of the fighters we have spoken to maintain their Twitter and Facebook accounts (more or less) autonomously. The communication between wannabes and fighters appears to be mostly self-initiated, and though faced with restrictions in relation to what they can and can't say, the exchanges are never entirely scripted or choreographed.

### *Fanboy Socialization*

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<sup>32</sup> See Rita Katz and Michael Kern, 'Terrorist 007, Exposed', *Washington Post*, 26 March 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Jarret M. Brachman and Alix N. Levine, 'You Too Can Be Awlaki', *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 35(1) (2011), pp. 27-32.

<sup>34</sup> J.M. Berger, 'Omar and Me: My Strange and Frustrating Relationship with an American Terrorist', *Foreign Policy*, 17 September 2013.

The third pillar of wannabe fighters' online ecosystem is interaction. Most of the time they spent online, the wannabes in our sample were busy sharing content, messaging friends, bouncing off ideas, or reading what others had posted. This came as no surprise. Social media is, by definition, social: its principal aim and purpose is to facilitate social interaction by electronic means. What struck us was the extent to which online interaction seemed to be central to their sense of being part of the movement, and how it played an important role in creating a sense of duty and mutual obligation. In many cases, online interaction spilled over into face to face meetings. In others, it was used to connect individuals or help them gain entry into Syria. In either case, what happened online (often) didn't remain online: its purpose and direction was to facilitate *offline* meetings through which online contacts and friendships could be mobilized and/or turned into 'action'.

This is nothing new. As long ago as 2007, when jihadists were hanging out in password-protected forums and Twitter and Facebook had only just started becoming household names, Marc Sageman identified social interaction as a key variable in online radicalization. He said:

[The internet] is based on interactivity between the members, which makes participants in [extremist online] forums change their mind. Some of the participants get so worked up that they declare themselves ready to be terrorists... Since this process takes place at home, often in the parental home, it facilitates the emergence of homegrown radicalization.<sup>35</sup>

The means and platforms through which online interaction takes place have changed, however. Since the forums have stopped being the virtual 'town squares' in which jihadist fanboys met and congregated, most of the fanboy socialization now takes place on open platforms like Twitter and then, often, migrates towards protected communications such as private messaging applications.

The impact of Islamic State media output on this process is marginal. The group's official videos and statements may, at times, be a 'conversation starter', but more important – and far more popular – are individual fighters' messages and pictures which the Islamic State controls only to a certain extent yet often spark prolonged interactions. Indeed, many of the conversations have nothing to do with the situation in Syria but are centered on day to day experiences, the flaws and failings of Western society, and casual jokes and banter.

The Islamic State's media campaign, therefore, is – at best – a background noise which may be important during the initial process of radicalisation but ceases to be central when fighters move from cognitive extremism to violent mobilization. The use of open platforms, direct communications with fighters, and interaction among each other are all crucial components of the wannabe fighters' online ecosystem. How they affect their decision to become foreign fighters will be the subject of the following chapters.

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<sup>35</sup> Marc Sageman before the U.S Senate, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Hearing on *Violent Islamist Extremism: The European Experience*, June 27, 2007, pp. 1-2.

## The Pains of Inaction

Much of the literature has focused on the Islamic State's official propaganda, a sophisticated enterprise coordinated through an extensive network of media offices and affiliated distributors.<sup>36</sup> With the notable exception of Erin Saltman and Melanie Smith's work on the recruitment of Western women to the conflict, little research has been done into how recruits interact with the less sophisticated, unofficial material produced and disseminated by sympathisers, much of which was produced before the establishment of the Caliphate. While this report does not have the capacity to fully investigate the extent to which the material affected the recruits desire to mobilise, an investigation of how recruits interacted with the material does illustrate a cycle of interaction that contributes towards our understanding of its effects on their desire to mobilise.

The cycle as a whole is referred to as *pains of inaction* and consists of three interrelated responses, which will be explained below; *moral outrage – inadequacy of non-violent activism – need for action*. Using primary social media data, which has been cited in the text and presented the appendix, the reactions of a sample of recruits can be analysed to provide an insight into the online material's radicalising effects.

### Recruit Reaction

While the motivations for foreign fighters have been shown to differ over time, a consistent theme promulgated by rebels groups and supporters has been that of injustice, both against Muslims as a whole and towards the Syrian people from the Assad regime, and the subsequent need to protect them. This has fuelled radical jihadist propaganda, which has used the draconian tactics of the Syrian state to instil powerful and compelling feelings of shame, humiliation, and unworthiness in the minds of recruits.

The reaction from recruits can be explained using *framing theory*. The theory focuses on the socialization, attraction and mobilization of supporters via the construction of a collective identity.<sup>37</sup> Events are framed through an 'interpretative schemata' which groups such as IS use to "locate, perceive, identify and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large."<sup>38</sup> Tarrow describes a three stage process stresses in which frames form around social occurrences of injustice.<sup>39</sup> First, a diagnostic frame is introduced that outlines problems as unjust and attributes blame; second, groups create a prognostic frame that proposes potential tactics and strategies to confront the previously diagnosed problem; finally, the group creates a persuasive, motivational rationale to prompt action.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> From the IS central leadership comes six media 'foundations' that have thirty-five provincial offices across the Maghreb and the Levant. See Winter (2015), p. 15.

<sup>37</sup> Tarrow, S., *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 3rd Ed., 2011, pp. 141-156

<sup>38</sup> Benford, R.D. & Snow, D., 'Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessments' *Annual Review of Sociology* Vol. 26, 2000, p. 614

<sup>39</sup> Tarrow (2011), p. 145

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 145



In this instance, the grievance coagulates around the “intra-Sunni solidarity norm” as described by Hegghammer.<sup>41</sup> The norm creates an inclination to support “fellow Muslims in need” and since being reinterpreted from a collective duty to an individual duty by Abdullah Azzam in the lead up to the Afghan-Soviet war,<sup>42</sup> has been consistently repeated by ideologues since the first throws of the Revolution.<sup>43</sup> This theme has remained prevalent in Islamic State’s current propaganda. *Victimhood* is identified by Winter as one of the six core themes found within the broader strategy.<sup>44</sup> The video circulated of the death of the Jordanian pilot Muadh al Kasabeh, edited together with sequences of coalition airstrikes to illustrate retributive violence theologically justified by *qisas*, is a notable example.<sup>45</sup> Scores of similar messaging can be found on the Internet, employing highly emotive terminology referencing persecution, oppression, injustice, and sexual violence.

In many cases, militant groups operating on the ground have referenced this themselves. An Australian foreign fighter with Islamic State featured in a video explaining the frame of mind that led him to migrate – or make *hijrah* – to Syria. In a video specifically aimed at Western and English-speaking Muslims, he said:

*“What am I doing? I have a good life here [in Australia]. I have a good job. I have an income. I have a car. I have a house. What sacrifice have I done for the sake of Allah? I can’t think of anything. All these nights we sleep comfortably [in the West], I thought about the people overseas and in the Muslim lands who are suffering, and this is when my journey really started beginning.”*<sup>46</sup>

This passage touches upon a number of common themes that are noticeable among all of the British fighters in our sample prior to their departure for Syria. The *pains of inaction* suffered by a particular fighter typically consist of three constituent components, or frames, which drive their radicalisation and desire to mobilise - moral outrage (diagnostic), frustration with the inadequacy of non-violent activism (prognostic), and a belief in the need for decisive action to defend the ummah (motivational rationale). Fighters tend to pass through all these emotional phases before feeling compelled to act – in this case, by joining militant groups in Syria.<sup>47</sup>

### *Moral outrage*

<sup>41</sup> Hegghammer, T., ‘Syria’s Foreign Fighters’, *Foreign Policy*, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013, last accessed on August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/12/09/syrias-foreign-fighters/>

<sup>42</sup> See Hegghammer (2010/2011)

<sup>43</sup> From as early as 2012, Saudi cleric Sheikh Mohammed al-Arifi, began issuing calls to jihad, particular to the West. See “Isis: Meet the cleric ‘encouraging British Muslims’ to fight jihad”, *Channel 4 News*, YouTube, June 26<sup>th</sup> 2014, last accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qnpfsr9p7n4&feature=youtu.be>

<sup>44</sup> Winter (2015), p. 25

<sup>45</sup> ‘Healing of the believers’ chests”, al-Furqan Foundation, February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2015

<sup>46</sup> ‘Stories from the land of the living: the story of Abu Khalid al-Cambodi from Australia,’ Al-Hayat Media, 21 April 2015

<sup>47</sup> See Appendix; Figure 1

There has been widespread revulsion over the manner, shape, and form of President Bashar al-Assad's attempts to suppress the Syrian uprising. This has permeated all sections of society, from individual actors, to human rights organisations up to the official pronouncements of Western governments. Among potential foreign fighters this has been coupled potently with a sense of personal obligation, responsibility, and guilt. Ali Kalantar was an 18-year-old student from Coventry who travelled to Syria in March 2014 in order to join Islamic State. Having reposted a number of images of the violence and suffering being bestowed upon innocent civilians,<sup>48</sup> a few weeks before his departure, Kalantar posted a nasheed (Islamic song) to Facebook, which revealed his growing sense of moral outrage at the situation in Syria.<sup>49</sup> The nasheed's lyrics state:

*"Oh my Ummah listen carefully because everything looks vague,  
Their bombs are thrown over us like poison  
And we have no sincere or honest friend,  
My son was shot in cold blood with no one to comfort or console me,  
Oh my father they stabbed you just as one drinks a sip of water,  
Tuba (a tree of paradise) is your home where there's no misery  
Oh my mother stop crying, your religion is rising up,  
I'm asking Allah to end this suffering and send down his soldiers (just as it)  
rains."<sup>50</sup>*

"This is amazing," Kalantar declared. Feeling a sense of obligation or duty towards the suffering of other Muslims is an intellectual process that has taken root in some Muslim communities through identification with an 'ummah consciousness.<sup>51</sup> This argues that all Muslims are united through a fraternity of the faithful, owing one another support, loyalty, and allegiance, particularly in times of turmoil or oppression.

That narrative has resonated especially loudly in the Syrian context. Mehdi Hasan, a foreign fighter who travelled from Portsmouth to join Islamic State, explained his reasons for going by referencing the use of sexual violence against those held prisoner by President Assad's forces. "There is a prison in Halab [Aleppo] with 300 female prisoners who are raped daily," he explained. "Some are pregnant and many have given birth. There are many of these prisons scattered over Syria. This is one small reason."<sup>52</sup> By 2015, such pronouncements would be met with incredulity given the Islamic State's systematic use of rape and sexual slavery as a standard practice and tool of oppression.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>48</sup> See Appendix; Figures 2, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Ali Al Farsi, Facebook profile, 19 February 2014. This profile is now offline but digitally archived in full by ICSR.

<sup>50</sup> 'SYRIA - Very Powerful Emotional Nasheed,' YouTube, 18 December 2012

<sup>51</sup> See Roy, O., *Globalized Islam: The Search For A New Ummah*, London: Hurst & Co, 2004; Kepel, G., *Jihad: the trail of political Islam*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2006

<sup>52</sup> Abu Dujana, Facebook post, 7 January 2014. This profile is now offline but digitally archived in full by ICSR.

<sup>53</sup> Callimachi, R., 'ISIS enshrines a theology of rape', *New York Times*, August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015, accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/14/world/middleeast/isis-enshrines-a-theology-of-rape.html>

The de facto leader of the Portsmouth group, twenty-three year old Ifthekar Jaman, repeatedly expressed his anger at the scale and urgency of the humanitarian crisis unfolding in the Levant.<sup>54</sup> Jaman also wrote about how “children were suffering” and of a “genocide” being conducted against the Muslims of Syria.<sup>55</sup> “May Allah make it easy for all the oppressed Muslims,” he wrote weeks before his departure. “May Allah bring a saviour soon.”<sup>56</sup> The group had grown increasingly frustrated with local imams who they felt were both unable and unqualified to adequately understand the situation in Syria. They took to the Internet to find alternative answers and listen to speeches from the Saudi cleric Mohammed al-Arifi, among others. Again, Arifi’s invectives are laden with highly emotive references to issues of honour, masculinity, and personal duty. The pronouncements drive a sense of righteous obligation borne of moral outrage:

*“No Muslim should accept to see a dear Muslim woman who was brought up on the Quran and Hijab being grappled and forcefully taken to the bedroom of a brutal tyrant. Which man can sleep or have his tears drop or feel a peace of mind while he hears of such circumstances befalling our Brothers and Sisters?”<sup>57</sup>*

Recruits ultimately begin to feel guilty about the relative comfort and security of their lives in Western society when contrasted against the suffering of Muslims abroad. In July 2013 another British fighter from Hounslow, Ismail Jabbar, wrote a lengthy post on Facebook that focused on the plight of the ummah. He wrote that he was in a “Bilad ash-Sham [land of Syria] state of mind,” while chastising Muslims in the West for letting their material comforts distract them from the suffering of the Syrian people.<sup>58</sup> In a subsequent message, Jabbar internalises this guilt and argues that he feels like a “coward” for “sleeping cosy” while Muslim women are subject to sexual violence around the world.<sup>59</sup> Although this was still quite some time before Jabbar finally migrated to Syria, he did embark on a more activist phase at this point, raising funds for humanitarian purposes.<sup>60</sup>

Although the process of Jabbar’s radicalisation was principally driven by the conflict in Syria, his sense of moral outrage and duty was not limited to events there. His horizons were global, expanding to encompass any number of different scenarios where Muslims are believed to be under attack. “I’m done with everyone and everything,” he wrote.<sup>61</sup> A similarly global outlook is evident in the online expressions of Mehdi Hasan and Ifthekar Jaman, along with another British fighter, Aseel Muthana, from Cardiff. All expressed their concern at Muslim suffering in Gaza, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Guantanamo Bay. “While your [sic] in bed, reflect on those tortured in Guantanamo and OUR brothers and sisters in OUR lands being raped and killed,” Muthana wrote.<sup>62</sup> That it considers itself a protective warden of the global ummah is

<sup>54</sup> Ifthekar Jaman Skype interview with Shiraz Maher, senior research fellow at ICSR (interview governed by research ethics application: REP (WSG)/13/14-10)

<sup>55</sup> Ifthekar Jaman (@ijaman08), Twitter, 19 February 2013. Full profile archived in full.

<sup>56</sup> Ifthekar Jaman (@ijaman08), Twitter, 22 February 2013. Full profile archived in full.

<sup>57</sup> Arifi, M., ‘Syria we will fight with you,’ YouTube, posted March 20<sup>th</sup> 2012, last accessed on August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oiYWEAyFW3E>

<sup>58</sup> Waran Aki’law, Facebook, July 2013. This profile is now offline but digitally archived in full by ICSR.

<sup>59</sup> Waran Aki’law, Facebook, August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013

<sup>60</sup> Waran Aki’law, Facebook, 2 August 2013

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., (2013)

<sup>62</sup> Abu Faris (@abufarriss), Twitter, November 2013

practical as well as theological; representing itself as a state with the ability to project power around the world (through its proxies) is a crucial aspect of justifying its legitimacy.<sup>63</sup>

### *Inadequacy of Non-Violent Activism*

Feelings of anger and outrage regarding the humanitarian crisis in Syria have been fuelled by the supposed indifference of the international community.<sup>64</sup> This can be thought of as 'radicalisation by omission,' where the expectation of international assistance has failed to materialise.<sup>65</sup> Ifthekar Jaman was dismayed by what he considered a derogation of duty from Muslim rulers towards the Muslims of Syria. "Why haven't the Saudi government sent their armies to support the Syrians?" he asked. "Why are the Saudi government quietly on the side while the ummah is suffering?"<sup>66</sup> Their apparent indifference towards the Syrians led him to conclude, "the Saudi government are the worst examples."<sup>67</sup>

In this case individual agents feel a greater sense of personal responsibility and obligation to take matters into their own hands, engaging in a form of vigilante militarism. "Sorry to say, but sending cereal does not stop this brutality," wrote Mehdi Hasan shortly after arriving in Syria. "A bullet to the head is far more effective."<sup>68</sup> Ifthekar Jaman was more sober in his assessment, recognising the virtue of charity – albeit in limited form. "Ya ikhwaani [oh brothers], give charity as much as you can," he urged his twitter followers. "But don't think you've done your duty. Charity doesn't prevent a tank, you do."<sup>69</sup>

The corollary is clear - while Muslims can give to charity, they should not consider this as sufficient to discharge their obligations towards the Syrian people. Their duties go further because the current situation is unbearable and the status quo can neither reverse nor adequately address the humanitarian suffering. Non-violent activism is therefore out-dated and needs to be replaced with a more direct form of confrontation.

### *Need for Effective Action*

Primed with sufficient outrage but disillusioned with the prevailing political climate, radicalised individuals conclude that the only solution available to them is to become fighters. This not only makes a tangible and practical change to the problem, as they perceive it, but is also a decision

<sup>63</sup> Winter, C., 'How the Islamic State makes sure you pay attention to it', *War on the Rocks*, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015, accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://warontherocks.com/2015/02/how-the-islamic-state-makes-sure-you-pay-attention-to-it/>

<sup>64</sup> 'The World's pitiful response to Syria's refugee crisis', *Amnesty International*, December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014, last accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2014/12/world-s-pitiful-response-syria-s-refugee-crisis/>

<sup>65</sup> The opposite might be thought of as 'radicalisation by commission,' that is, for example, radicalisation caused by our participation in the Iraq war.

<sup>66</sup> Ifthekar Jaman (@ijaman08), Twitter, 6 February 2013

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Abu Dujana, Facebook post, 7 January 2014

<sup>69</sup> Ifthekar Jaman (@ijaman08), Twitter, 17 July 2013; See Appendix; Figure 4

believed to be invested with unparalleled virtues and divine rewards.<sup>70</sup> Quite often these decisions to join militant groups are also bound up with notions of masculinity and valour.<sup>71</sup> As Deeyah Khan notes, modern media tends to provide a message for men of heroism that is defined through “control, independence and the ability to commit violence, from superheroes to crime dramas.”<sup>72</sup> An interplay occurs between respect and fear – those that feel disrespected want to be feared. This is summed up in a tweet from Ali Kalantar: - “running away from jihad will not save you from death. You can die as a coward or you can die as a martyr.”<sup>73</sup> Ismail Jabber expressed similar sentiments, writing, “the ummah is bleeding and now its time to findbout [sic] who are the lions, cats and snakes [sic].”<sup>74</sup>

For Mehdi Hasan, it no longer made sense to remain in the United Kingdom. He felt obligated to be in Syria and had come to regard Britain as a country where it was impermissible for Muslims to live permanently.<sup>75</sup> Instead, his loyalty was now owed to the “micro Caliphates” established all over the world.<sup>76</sup> His decision to migrate to Syria was also mixed with a degree of fatalism, stemming from normative Islamic belief that an individual’s lifespan is predestined and fixed.<sup>77</sup> As Kalantar argued, “running away from jihad will not save you from death.” As the moment is already fixed, a true believer should migrate to the battlefields not only to demonstrate their faith, but to also relieve the suffering of the ummah. Mehdi Hasan explained this clearly in a Facebook post arguing, “I’m gonna do my best to help ppl [sic], my death is written. Ifthekar fought his first battle after 5 months in jihad and got shadah [martyrdom] whilst an azeri bro fought in jihad for 15 years and he got shadah in the same battle.”<sup>78</sup>

Ifthekar Jaman also wrote extensively on how the *pains of inaction* involved missing out on the supposed rewards of a holy warrior and martyr. “The gates of jannah [paradise] will be so amazing that you would stand in awe for years admiring its beauty,” he wrote. “This is just the gates. Now imagine jannah, with the small imagination we have been given, waterfalls from high skies, valleys with the most beautiful plants, mountains.”<sup>79</sup> Jaman frequently reminded his readers about the virtuous of jihad, martyrdom, and the nirvana of paradise. Ismail Jabber went further by expressing his guilt at failing to act, feeling that the longer he avoided jihad, the more *jahil* (or ignorant) he was becoming. His use of the term *jahil* is particularly relevant here because it refers to the idolatrous and polytheistic state of pre-Islamic Arabia, generally held by Muslims to have been an era of spiritual darkness and moral decay. “I’ve seen light and [yet] become jahil,” Jabber wrote. “But this time I’m going to the light even if it has to burn me.”<sup>80</sup> It is clear that Jabber was wrestling with the various phases of his radicalisation – the sense of duty,

<sup>70</sup> See Appendix; Figure 5

<sup>71</sup> See Appendix; Figure 6

<sup>72</sup> Khan, D., ‘Jihad Masculinity’, Huffington Post Blog, July 10<sup>th</sup> 2015, last accessed August 26<sup>th</sup> 2015, at [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/deeyah-khan/jihad-deeyah-khan\\_b\\_7770578.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/deeyah-khan/jihad-deeyah-khan_b_7770578.html)

<sup>73</sup> Ali Kalantar (RandomGuyWithASuit/@AliAlfarsiii), Twitter, 29 October 2014

<sup>74</sup> Waran Aki’law, Facebook, 16 November 2013

<sup>75</sup> Mehdi Hasan (@AbuDujana), Twitter, 25 August 2013

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 22 November 2012

<sup>77</sup> See Watt, W., ‘Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam’, *The Muslim World*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 1946, pp. 124-152. Also see Appendix; Figure 7

<sup>78</sup> Abu Dujana, Facebook post, 7 January 2014

<sup>79</sup> Ifthekar Jaman (@ijaman08), Twitter, 27 January 2013

<sup>80</sup> Waran Aki’law, Facebook, 2 August 2013

moral compulsion, frustration, and pain of inaction, versus social, emotional, and familial pressures to stay. Yet, within two months of deciding he would have to “go to the light,” Jabber was fighting in Syria.

The effect that events in Syria and Iraq, projected through improvised and startling propaganda materials, have had on our sample of foreign fighters’ desire to travel to the Levant is clear. It is not enough to affect the decision to travel however. Through an exposition of what this report describes as *fighting communities*, the next section will illustrate how the online interactions within and between peer groups of recruits and fighters creates a stake in the conflict, thus cementing the decision to travel in the recruit’s mind.

## Fighting Communities

The previous chapter illustrates how the cumulative effects of interactions with online propaganda create *pains of inaction* among recruits. This creates a moral crisis that has a profound effect on their desire to mobilise. A second activity that this report argues contributes towards radicalisation, specifically the decision to mobilise, is interaction within *fighting communities* made up of recruits and fighters already in theatre.

Using modern information technology and continually evolving social media platforms, foreign fighters and recruits can, for the first time, interact with each other directly in real time. Rather than relying on the writings, audio recordings and video lectures of learned but inaccessible ideologues, recruits can now receive wisdom and encouragement directly and on a personalised basis. This unprecedented accessibility allows recruits to build a stake in the conflict, connecting with fighters before seeking to emulate them. Using social media data, again cited in text and presented in the appendix, this chapter will illustrate how these *fighting communities* are created, how they operate and how the dynamics within them contribute towards radicalisation of the recruit.

### Platforms

The research has identified two strands of interaction that occur within these *fighting communities*, which this report categorises as *anonymous* and *public*. The platforms used provide the fighter with the opportunity to proselytise his group's message while giving personal advice and guidance to recruits. These are not mutually exclusive interactions, however they are at times distinctive within the data.

The *anonymous* strand is the interaction of recruits and fighters through platforms with anonymity functions, the most prevalent of which is Ask.fm. This platform asks users to set up an account, provide a name/alias and a short biography, for which the individual decides upon the level of discretion shown. Users then receive questions from anonymous contributors; once the user has responded, both the question and the answer are posted onto the users timeline, concealing the identity of the questioner and providing a rolling commentary. Given the nature of the platform, it is the strand most commonly used by fighters to give advice across a range of topics.

The *public* strand involves the interactions of potential and actual foreign fighters over platforms that are open, in which all participants are identified through their usernames and the personal information they have provided. The most commonly utilised platform for this has been Twitter. Twitter does have a privacy function, however none of the fighters in our sample had utilised it. This is logical; for the foreign fighter, messaging over open platforms is 'framing' in itself. Openly flaunting violent and 'illegal' activity is a central tenet to the identity of the foreign fighter, and a common behaviour for an individual actively trying to disavow the West.

### *Anonymous Interaction*

With regard the *anonymous* strand, given the sheer volume of data collected, a complete identification of every topic was not possible.<sup>81</sup> The research identified topics that separate into two broad categories, both of which illuminate the role that the fighter plays in the community – *advice* and *inspiration*. *Advice* falls into *hijrah* and non-*hijrah* related topics, both of which are important. *Hijrah* related enquiries include the permissibility of female mobilisation, finances, logistics of travel and fighting experience.<sup>82</sup> Non-*hijrah* related advice tends to cover topics in which the contributor has identified a lack of guidance in navigating everyday domestic issues from schooling to personal loans.<sup>83</sup>

*Inspiration* is a nebulous category in which recruits look to relate with the actual fighters on more emotive terms. This can be through requests for spiritual and moral support on matters such as mitigating against family reaction to migration and killing fellow Muslims, to at times just sharing affection in ways synonymous with ‘in-group love.’<sup>84</sup>

### *Public Interaction*

The *public* strand of interactions offers a different perspective on the importance of contacts between fighters and recruits. The fighter becomes a chameleon of different personas, from the missionary jihadist to the devoted martyr. In all the cases collected, members of the sample are seen interacting with other members of the sample, some of whom have already made *hijrah*. In some cases, a progression and intensification of views is visible, and at other times not. Other interactions shown here are between fighters both of whom have already travelled. Interaction done openly such as this sends an empowering message to recruits and thus needs to be included.

- *Mashadhur Choudhary and Iftheekar Jaman*

Mashadhur Choudhury was a member of the ‘Portsmouth cluster’ of fighters who travelled at different times to Syria in 2013. Choudhary is the only member of the sample to have been arrested, charged and sentenced to four years in prison on his return from Syria, and thus more knowledge of his trajectory is known. According to court documents, plans to travel developed during the summer of 2013, culminating in his departure in the October.<sup>85</sup> His interlocutor was Iftheekar Jaman, also in our sample, who had travelled to the region in May 2013. Choudhury only remained in the Levant for two weeks before allegedly being rejected as a recruit. Thus his Ask.fm and his twitter do not reflect his time in theatre.

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<sup>81</sup> Over ten thousand unique inquiries, stored by the ICSR in full, were collected and stored in the database. This dissertation did not have the scope to code the entire dataset.

<sup>82</sup> All of the interactions are reproduced with the original spelling and grammatical errors. See Appendix; Figures 8, 9.

<sup>83</sup> Appendix; Figures 10, 11

<sup>84</sup> Sageman identifies love for the in-group as a strong motivating factor in the decision to commit violence. See Sageman, M., *Understanding Terror Networks*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania University Press, 2004. See Appendix; Figures 12, 13.

<sup>85</sup> Casciani, D., ‘Mashadhur Choudhary: Serial liar and jihadist’, *BBC News*, May 20<sup>th</sup> 2014, accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-27491066>



His twitter account is a valuable example of online interactions with actual fighters however, illustrating the offline interactions that were taking place in the lead up to his departure, which will be focused on more in the next chapter. His online interaction with fellow members of the Portsmouth cluster was an inevitable result of their friendship. With Jaman, they range from the banal matters of arranging meeting times at their mosque, debates and disagreement, and indications of potentially making *hijrah*.<sup>86</sup>

- *Aseel Muthana*

Aseel Muthana, along with his brother Nasser Muthanna, were two fighters from Cardiff who came to have associations with the Portsmouth cluster. Aseel's early twitter interactions demonstrate an interest in foreign fighters months before making *hijrah*. During the month of November, Aseel retweeted or interacted with five different foreign fighters, one of which was his brother Nasser. Four of those fighters originate from the UK while the other, Abu Fulan, was Danish.<sup>87</sup> In November he reached out to Abu Qa'qaa, a fighter from the UK, seeking a link to his Tumblr blog 'Paladin of Jihad' which documented his transition from recruit to fighter and his subsequent experiences in the Levant.<sup>88</sup> As his tweets show, Aseel was an active twitter contributor within the milieu he became apart of.<sup>89</sup>

### Understanding the Dynamics

The dynamics within the *fighting community* that contribute towards the decision to mobilise can be conceptualised on two levels. The macro level describes the broader effects the new media ecology on the socialisation of individuals, in this instance recruits interested in becoming foreign fighters. The micro level describes the effects that increased accessibility to foreign fighters has on the recruit's attitudes towards the conflict and the responsibilities he has towards his fellow Muslims.

### *The New Media Ecology*

The phrase 'Web 2.0' is commonly cited in the literature on online radicalisation and refers to the World Wide Web's transition during the new millennium into the second generation, a space that now "encompasses a growing array of interactive communications systems facilitated by a rapidly expanding set of platforms."<sup>90</sup> The period gave birth to the platforms that we recognise today – "numerous websites, blogs, forums and message boards"<sup>91</sup> – while laying the foundation for the most modern iterations of apps and instant messaging services that have seamlessly

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<sup>86</sup> See Appendix; Figures 14, 15, 16

<sup>87</sup> See Appendix; Figures 17, 18

<sup>88</sup> This blog is catalogued in full by the ICSR. See Appendix; Figure 19

<sup>89</sup> See Appendix; Figures 20, 21

<sup>90</sup> Amble, J.C., "Combating terrorism in the new media environment", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 35(5), 2012, p. 339

<sup>91</sup> Ducol, B., "Uncovering the French-speaking Jihadisphere: An exploratory analysis", *Media, War and Conflict* Vol. 5(1), 2012, p. 51

interwoven into our “new media ecology.”<sup>92</sup> Social media, as Haidt notes, makes it “extraordinarily easy to join crusades, express solidarity and outrage, and shun traitors.”<sup>93</sup> Facebook was founded in 2004, for example; this means that the first wave of students who spent their formative years using the platform are now reaching early adulthood, the prime demographic for mobilisation.<sup>94</sup> Haidt goes on to argue that these first true “social-media natives” are different in how they share and engage with friends over moral judgments, news stories, and pro-social endeavours compared the previous generation, whose dominant technology was television.<sup>95</sup>

This has undoubtedly affected their socialisation. For Shapiro and Margolin, ‘standing out’ i.e. developing an identity while pursuing autonomy, and ‘fitting in’ i.e. finding acceptance from peers through comfortable affiliations, are the paradoxical yet crucial tasks in an individual’s social development during adolescents.<sup>96</sup> For the authors, this clearly intersects in the modern age with the use of these platforms, relating to adolescents’ social connectivity and identity development more so than previous communications technologies. For Shapiro and Margolin, sociability, self-esteem and the nature of the SNS feedback act as important potential moderators, affecting the identity creation of the individual as well as the development of the offline interactions.<sup>97</sup>

A new report from the Pew Research Centre that explored the “new contours of friendship in the digital age” supports these findings.<sup>98</sup> Rather than the traditional perception that teenagers are in some way wasting time online, the study indicates not just that new relationships are being created but that offline, real world friendships are being strengthened. This appears to follow a broader sociological trend that teenagers are spending less time face-to-face and that the online world provides a space for them to ‘hang-out’ more.<sup>99</sup> One of the authors, Lenhart, claimed that “many teenagers can’t choose to go and physically be with their friends...any number of things may contribute to teenagers having fewer opportunities to gather physically than they once did, from changes in drivers’ licensing to genuinely unsafe neighbourhoods to a parental perception that allowing a teenager the freedom to roam freely by bike or on foot is less safe than it was in

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<sup>92</sup> See Awan, A. et al., *Radicalisation and Media: Connectivity and terrorism in the new media ecology*, Routledge, Oxford, 2011.

<sup>93</sup> Haidt, J., Lukianoff, G., ‘The Coddling of the American Mind’, *The Atlantic*, September 2015, last accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/09/the-coddling-of-the-american-mind/399356/>

<sup>94</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., (2015)

<sup>96</sup> Shapiro, L.A.S, Margolin, G., ‘Growing Up Wired: Social Networking Sites and Adolescent Psychosocial Development’, *Clinical Child Family Psychological Review*, (17), 2014, p. 1

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. (2014)

<sup>98</sup> Lenhart, A. et al, ‘Teens, Technology & Friendships: Video games, social media and mobile phones play an integral role in how teens meet and interact with friends’, *Pew Research Centre*, August, 2015, accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://www.pewinternet.org/files/2015/08/Teens-and-Friendships-FINAL2.pdf>, p. 2.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. (2015)

the past.”<sup>100</sup> “The online space is a way of expanding teenagers’ ability to be with friends when they aren’t able to be with them in person.”<sup>101</sup>

From the perspective of radicalisation, this behaviour creates online milieus that act as echo chambers in which interactions based on ‘in-group love’ and/or ‘out-group hate’ can build powerful social bonds, especially in the case of violent extremism. Brewer notes that equilibrium is achieved through “identification with distinctive social groups that meet both needs simultaneously. Inclusion needs are satisfied by assimilation within the group while differentiation is satisfied by intergroup distinctions.”<sup>102</sup> To devolve to violence is an attempt to earn acceptance, respect and ultimately love within the group one is attempting to identify with. Another dynamic, provided by McCauley and Moskalenko and reiterated by Sageman, is that of the ‘risky shift.’ When a group initially begins to form, there is an increased level of agreement, and a ‘shift’ in opinion from the moderate to the extreme.<sup>103</sup> Sageman expands on this theory by focusing in on the level of the individual. Extremists, he argues, radicalise in order to attain identity within the “clique” rather than due to ideology or ‘out-group’ animosity. Grievances within the clique become amplified, bonds become stronger and values become more insular and rejectionist towards the outside world.<sup>104</sup>

All of this evidence chimes with the experiences of the recruits in our sample. Each recruit had significant social media footprints, indicating a large amount of time spent online, and used the mediums to expand their social circles. It was through Twitter, for example, that the Manchester duo of Abu Qa’qaa and Raphael Hostey came across Ifthekar Jaman and the Portsmouth cluster, with whom they would subsequently meet and receive *tazkiyyah*.<sup>105</sup> Tam Hussein, writing about the West London fighter Fatlum Shakalu, noted this about the group from which he emerged, that is applicable to each of the clusters in our sample:

*“The [online/offline] connections they were making, the culture they were creating...they had their own terminology, they wore their Salafi-Jihadism on their robes, blended it with rebellious Roadmannism, garnished it with a bit of Anwar Awlaki, Quran, Sunnah and a bit of thug life. They could yearn desperately for forgiveness and paradise, and in their youthful ardour want a sense of belonging and adventure.”*<sup>106</sup>

### *Building a Stake in the Conflict*

<sup>100</sup> Dell’Antonia, K.J., ‘Teenagers Leading Happy, Connected Lives Online’, *The New York Times*, August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015, last accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at <http://parenting.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/08/06/teenagers-leading-happy-connected-lives-online/>

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. (2015)

<sup>102</sup> Brewer, M. B., ‘In-group Identification and Conflict: When does In-group Love Become Out-group Hate’, In *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction*, ed. by Ashmore, E., et al., Oxford: OUP, 2001, p. 43

<sup>103</sup> McCauley, M., & Moskalenko, S., “Mechanisms of Political Radicalization,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 20, 2008, p. 421

<sup>104</sup> Sageman, M., “The Next Generation of Terror,” *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 165, 2008, p. 41

<sup>105</sup> This is further explained in Chapter Three.

<sup>106</sup> Hussein (2015)

This section looks to further the work of Brachman and Levine with regard the relationship between jihadist ideologues and potential radicals by arguing that the foreign fighter represents the progression of a dynamic they first identified in 2011.<sup>107</sup> Consider this quote from their 2011 article 'You Too Can Be Awlaki':

*Youth who are seeking role models need someone who is easier to emulate, a figure that they can become without too much work or thought, and who makes them feel as if they are producing something meaningful and relevant.*<sup>108</sup>

While capturing the essence of the recruit's psychology, the quote is not related to foreign fighters but the relationship between online jihadist activists, a nuanced and important difference. Originally, the interactions between jihadist ideologues and recruits were of a style befitting that of producer and consumer - the 'heavy-weight' ideologues such as Abdullah Azzam and Abu Muhammed al-Maqdisi produced literature and speeches that were disseminated around the world for potential jihadists to read and listen to. The ideologues thus relied on interlocutors to connect them with the their global audience. The Committee for Advice and Reform, for example, was Osama Bin Laden's pressure group based in London that printed and provided materials to would-be jihadists across the UK.<sup>109</sup> Given the decentralised nature of the transnational jihadist network, especially with the emergence of Al Qaeda, the culture of contact and accessibility to the most influential ideologues was non-existent.

The advent of this interface has had a profound effect on the relationship between the ideologue and the potential jihadist and paved the way for the creation of the 'Celebrity Shaykh.'<sup>110</sup> The original ideologues were learned scholars with high levels of legitimacy but low levels of accessibility. That is not to say that the advent of information technologies affected their influence - far from it.<sup>111</sup> However, the face of jihadism did begin to change. Younger, more technologically savvy preachers were able to substitute theological and scholarly depth with charisma and translatability. Soon, potential jihadists could follow these ideologues online, watch and read their material and seek to emulate them in a way not previously possible.<sup>112</sup> They could also interact with fellow enthusiasts in password-protected forums and chat-rooms, whose influence on radicalisation has been well established in the literature.<sup>113</sup>

The most prominent example of this trend was Anwar al-Awlaki, arguably the most influential English language propagandist of his generation.<sup>114</sup> Brachman and Levine note a number of

<sup>107</sup> Brachman, J.M., Levine, A.N., 'You Too Can Be Awlaki!', *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 1, Winter 2011, pp. 25-46

<sup>108</sup> Brachman and Levine (2011), p. 30

<sup>109</sup> See Curtis, M., *Secret Affairs: Britain's Collusion with Radical Islam*, London: Serpent's Tail, 2012.

<sup>110</sup> Brachman and Levine (2011), p. 29

<sup>111</sup> Maqdisi, Abu Bak Naji, Osama Bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam remain heavily cited by all Sunni insurgent groups, regardless of their allegiances.

<sup>112</sup> See Meleagrou-Hitchens, A., 'As American as Apple Pie: How Anwar al-Awlaki became the Face of Western Jihad', *ICSR: London*, 2011

<sup>113</sup> See Stevens, T., & Neumann, P., 'Countering Online Radicalisation: A Strategy for Action,' *ICSR: London*, 2009

<sup>114</sup> Roshonora Choudhary, for example, sentenced to life in prison for the attempted murder of Steven Pimms MP for his vote in favour of the Iraq war, cited the lectures of Awlaki as a direct influence in her interviews with police.

factors that contributed towards his accessibility. First was the style of his numerous online videos, lectures and recordings, “a caricature of previous generations of hard-line Salafi clerics.”<sup>115</sup> Awlaki lacked the knowledge and expertise of his forbearers, but was perceived as more authentic than the Sheikhs he looked to emulate.<sup>116</sup> The messages retained the piety but lost the religiosity, which attracted an audience that lacked the depth of education required to appreciate the ‘heavy-weight’ ideologues of previous generations.<sup>117</sup> His “back-to-basics” approach was also very effective, impacting on both emotional and intellectual levels.<sup>118</sup> This increased accessibility through technology allowed recruits to emulate their ideologues and carry the momentum of the jihadist movement without the precondition of entrenched theological and scholarly legitimacy.

This inverse relationship between scholarly legitimacy and accessibility has reached its zenith with the advent of modern *fighting communities*. Actual foreign fighters have become the lightest of the “lite sheikhs” that Brachman and Levine theorised, the effectiveness of their messaging and approach a result of the sheer level of accessibility they afford online. An irony is at play here. In his exhaustive investigation into the mobilisation of Fatlum Shakalu, Hussein notes a high number of recruits without the required skill set to properly interpret the text. For the “born again devotee”, alienated from the community and inspired by the disembodied fighter living in the Levant, “no middle man was required to distil that seemingly contradictory mass of Prophetic sayings and Quranic verses.”<sup>119</sup>

Referring back to the earlier quote, the primed individuals are looking for “role models” to emulate; the ease with which these recruits can interact with the actual fighters, who are able to provide easy answers to difficult questions, builds familiarity trust between the fighter and the recruit, strengthening the decision of the fighter to travel. While offering the opportunity to produce actions that are ‘meaningful and relevant’, the communities elicit the characteristics of the ‘in-group’, echo chambers in which the themes and sentiments intensify and result in increased chances of radicalisation.

The first two chapters have shown how online interactions can affect the desire and decision of the recruit to mobilise. The third chapter will argue that the transition from decision to action cannot be explained with recourse to the Internet, and instead relies on offline interactions within and between peer groups.

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<sup>115</sup> Brachman and Levine (2011), p. 27

<sup>116</sup> Brachman and Levine (2011), p. 27

<sup>117</sup> Brachman and Levine (2011), p. 28

<sup>118</sup> Brachman and Levine (2011), p. 28

<sup>119</sup> Hussein (2015)

## On and Offline

In July 2015, Syed Choudhary was jailed for plotting to travel to join Islamic State. The prosecution described how the teenager began researching the conflict online, accessing websites such as '10 reasons to join ISIS' and 'Turkey travel, Jihadist Highway.'<sup>120</sup> His lawyer noted that Choudhary "was openly using Facebook and Twitter accounts that could link to him to material that was highly incriminating. There appears to be no attempt at all to disguise his involvement or insulate himself from detection."<sup>121</sup> Syed's case can be understood with reference to the last two chapters, which have sought to demonstrate how online activity can affect the desire and decision to become a foreign fighter. However, a detail in the case perfectly encapsulates the argument of this chapter and the driving thesis of the report; when first arrested in December 2014, Choudhary told police that the reason that he had not travelled was because he had not found anyone trustworthy to travel with.<sup>122</sup> Thus, while the online activity may affect the desire and decision to travel, overwhelming evidence suggests that the actual mobilisation relies on offline interactions. Having explained the dynamics behind this mechanism, the chapter will use recent historical data to illustrate two key examples in which offline interactions appear central to the recruit's transition from decision to action.

### Explaining the Dynamics

The dynamics of offline interactions, while not a new phenomenon, represents a key factor in the practical mobilisation of foreign fighters. While the online *fighting communities* help to build a commitment to the cause through virtual connections, the peer-to-peer relationships are crucial in facilitating the transition from decision to actual mobilisation. Evidence suggests that this is practical as well as psychological; resources and logistics become easier to organise in a group than individually. The same goes for deception; convincing concerned relatives or friends that your intentions and actions are benign may become more plausible if part of a small group of 'trusted' peers.

This is a trend that has become central to the way that mobilisation has come to be understood. In America, a minority within the Somali-American population in the suburbs around Minneapolis have actively facilitated the recruitment of fighters to Islamic State, with the most recent arrests occurring in mid-April 2015.<sup>123</sup> At least 59 Belgian foreign fighters were affiliated with *Sharia4Belgium*, with most originating out of the geographical axis of Antwerp, Mechelen, Vilvorde and Brussels.<sup>124</sup> Of the eighteen Swedish fighters identified by the Combating Terrorism Center in 2013, eleven were from two small neighbouring suburbs of Gothenburg –

<sup>120</sup> Spillet, R., 'Teenager who planned to join ISIS in Syria and said 'all gay people should be killed' is jailed for more than three years', *Mail Online*, July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015, accessed August 26<sup>th</sup> 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3152172/Teenager-planned-join-ISIS-jailed-three-years.html>

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. (2015)

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. (2015)

<sup>123</sup> Johnson, K., & Bacon, J., 'Six arrested in anti-terrorism sweep, latest in string of such cases', *USA Today*, April 20<sup>th</sup> 2015, accessed August 26<sup>th</sup> 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/04/19/federal-agents-terror-sweep-minneapolis-san-diego/26054419/>

<sup>124</sup> Van Ostaeyen, P., 'Belgian Fighters in Syria and Iraq – April 2015,' April 5<sup>th</sup> 2015, accessed April 26<sup>th</sup> 2015, at <https://pietervanostaeyen.wordpress.com/?s=belgian+foreign+fighters&submit=Search>

Angered and Bergsjön – leading Magnus Norrell to conclude that recruitment in Sweden occurred through ties of friendship.<sup>125</sup> In discussing *Sharia4Holland*, the AIVD concluded that these movements have created “an environment in which people with similar ideas meet and develop radical ideas into jihadist ideologies. This group dynamic has led to a rapid radicalization of many individuals as well as concrete attempts to join the jihad in Syria.”<sup>126</sup>

The creation of strong personal bonds is important, for two reasons. Firstly, they facilitate the first psychological step into “high risk activism” as described by Douglas McAdam.<sup>127</sup> In McAdam’s model, the individual first becomes primed through socialisation with friends and family, making them receptive to new political attitudes. When offline contact with activists follows, the chances of low-risk activism increases. For the individual to then transition into high-risk activism, such as mobilisation to fight jihad, ‘biographical availability’ i.e. “the absence of personal constraints that may increase the costs and risks of movement participation, such as full-time employment, marriage, and family responsibilities” becomes the limiting factor.<sup>128</sup> This paper suggests that the intensely existential and emotive nature of the current conflict affects the extent to which ‘biographical availability’ becomes a limiting factor. Fighters have shown a willingness to overcome these barriers in unprecedented ways, including uprooting entire families, including young children and pregnant women, and travelling to Syria.<sup>129</sup>

The strong personal bonds also create the basis for the potential recruits to receive *tazkiyyah*. This is best understood as “reference” or “guarantee” for a prospective fighter that establishes their sincerity and bona fides. For the individual receiving *tazkiyyah* it immediately validates their commitment and standing to a fighting group to whom they would otherwise be entirely unknown. For the individual providing *tazkiyyah* it also denotes their trust in, and loyalty towards, the recipient. *Tazkiyyah* is provided, therefore, by an actual fighter in support of a recruit. Militant groups often require these references both as a security requirement to mitigate against spies, but also to ensure the recruit is devotionally committed.

The underlying element to these dynamics, one that ultimately explains the success or failure of any relationship, and one that can be illustrated to have been crucial in the recruitment of these individuals, is trust. Online interactions become limited in this regard; using jihadi web forums as an example, Hegghammer argues, “the scarcity of non-verbal cues... facilitates deceptive mimicry which undermines the interpersonal trust for sensitive transactions.”<sup>130</sup> While not quite to the same degree given the more personal nature of the interactions between fighter and recruit,

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<sup>125</sup> Norrell quote in Gudmondson, P., ‘The Swedish Foreign Fighter Contingent in Syria’, *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel*, September 24<sup>th</sup> 2013, accessed April 26<sup>th</sup> 2015, at <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-swedish-foreign-fighter-contingent-in-syria>

<sup>126</sup> “Reisbewegingen jihadistisch terrorisme,” AIVD statement on movements of terrorism, General Intelligence and Security Service of the Netherlands, September 2013.

<sup>127</sup> McAdam, D., ‘Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer,’ *American Journal of Sociology*, Volume 92, Issue 1, 1986, pp. 64-90

<sup>128</sup> *ibid.* p. 70

<sup>129</sup> Brooks-Pollock, T., ‘Yes we have joined ISIS say missing British family of 12 who fled to Syria’, *The Independent*, July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015, accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/yes-we-have-joined-isis-say-missing-british-family-of-12-who-fled-to-syria-luton-islamic-state-isis-isil-iraq-10365915.html>

<sup>130</sup> Hegghammer, T., ‘Interpersonal Trust on Jihadi Internet Forums’, Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2014, accessed March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015 [http://hegghammer.com/\\_files/Interpersonal\\_trust.pdf](http://hegghammer.com/_files/Interpersonal_trust.pdf).

trust reaches a threshold without face-to-face interactions. Merari advances the argument, claiming that trust precipitates violence. The decision to commit an extreme act of violence, for example a suicide bombing, is a result of the desire to gain social credibility within the group.<sup>131</sup> Love for both the group and the cause, in this case the protection of the *ummah*, explains the desire and decision to violently mobilise.

Using evidence procured through social media analysis and news coverage, three examples stand out as illustrating the importance of offline contacts – the Coventry Cluster, the Portsmouth and Manchester Network, and the West London Cluster.

## The Data

### *Overview of British Fighters*

Before illustrating two examples of how clusters work in facilitating travel, a brief glance at the total number of British fighters collected provides some inferences that support the thesis and while countering the ‘internet causality’ explanation. Of the 123 British fighters in the database for whom information could be procured, fifty-seven fighters travelled with or knew at least one other fighter before mobilising. This supports the thesis in two ways. First is the obvious case that evidence of individuals travelling in group’s supports the offline interaction thesis. Second, that information of the travel plans for the other sixty-six could not be procured through open source methods suggests that they were not avid users of social media, thus negating the idea that online interactions play such a crucial role. Two examples will now be illustrated to show how offline interactions can influence mobilisation.

### *The Coventry Cluster*

The offline behaviour of Ali Kalantar, a foreign fighter from Coventry, chimes with the driving thesis. In chapter one, we described the extent to which Ali Kalanta’s desire and decision to mobilise were affected by his interactions with online propaganda. What appears to have been a crucial element in his decision to mobilise, however, was his long-term friendship with two friends from home, Rashed Amani and Mohammed Hadi, who travelled with him. Interactions with a radical imam at a local mosque are also cited as potential influences by his family, who perceived changes in Kalantar’s behaviour as originating from this contact.

Reports suggest that Kalantar asked to borrow his passport from his parents in order to fill out university related documents, while asking to borrow £1000 from his brother in order to pay for a new laptop.<sup>132</sup> This indicates that Kalantar was not considered a risk by his loved ones, who

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<sup>131</sup> See Merari, A., ‘Social, organizational and psychological factors in suicide terrorism,’ in Bjørge, T. ed., *Root Causes of Terrorism: Myths, Realities and Ways Forward*, Oxford, Routledge, 2005.

<sup>132</sup> Taher, A., et al., ‘British jihadist who married one of the 16-year-old Manchester ‘terror twins’ is ‘killed fighting for ISIS in Iraq’, *Mail Online*, December 6<sup>th</sup> 2014, accessed April 26<sup>th</sup> 2015, at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2863521/British-jihadist-married-one-16-year-old-Manchester-terror-twins-Syria-killed-fighting-ISIS-Iraq.html>



perhaps had no indication that Kalantar was in any way radicalised. This is a common theme for foreign fighters around the world; the family of teenager Abdullah Emir, an Australian convert to Islam who travelled to Syria and became the frontman of at least two ISIS videos, believed that he had gone on a fishing trip. The family only became aware of his intentions when he contacted them from Turkey, days before crossing the border into Syria.<sup>133</sup>

It also indicates the importance of offline interactions in facilitating mobilisation, rather than irrational fanaticism. Reports suggest that Mohammed Baryalei, a known foreign fighter recruiter in Sydney, heavily influenced Elmir's rapid radicalisation and mobilisation.<sup>134</sup> For Kalantar, his close friendships with Amani and Hadi appear crucial in explaining his mobilisation. Kalantar and Amani are featured prominently in online postings, specifically Instagram, in which Ali refers to them as "brothers since day one" and Mohammed Hadi as a "brother from different mother."<sup>135</sup>

The influence of the imam is yet to be fully understood. Reports from the family at the time suggested that Kalantar had been 'groomed' by the imam, confirming that Kalantar had been spending more time at the Mosque.<sup>136</sup> The full extent of these interactions on Kalantar's desire and decision to travel will probably never be known. However, reports from his family suggest that they did coincide with a change in his behaviour, that he had taken more interest in Islam and began praying regularly. Kalantar had been commenting on and sharing propaganda material for a minimum of six months before finally leaving; that the contact with the imam was only in the final month of this time period strengthens the idea that the relationship may have precipitated Kalantar's decision to make *hijrah*, thus highlighting the importance of offline interactions. Similar relationships with imams have been reported by the families of men from the Cardiff Cluster (involving brothers Aseel and Nasser Muthana, and their friend Reyaad Khan), and for a number of men from West London including Fatlum Shalaku.

### *Ifthekar Jaman: Establishing a Tazkiyyah Network*

One of the most illuminating examples comes from a large cluster of fighters associated with Ifthekar Jaman, a young man from Portsmouth who travelled to Syria in May 2013.<sup>137</sup> The trajectory of his radicalisation is largely typical. Having watched videos on YouTube about the Syrian uprising, Jaman was told by local imams that the conflict was sectarian in nature and therefore not a "true" jihad.<sup>138</sup> Unconvinced, he researched more controversial opinions online

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<sup>133</sup> 'Teen Jihadist Abdullah Elmir groomed like paedophile victim: terrorism expert', Sydney Morning Herald, October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2014, accessed on April 26<sup>th</sup> 2015, at <http://www.smh.com.au/national/teen-jihadist-abdullah-elmir-groomed-like-paedophile-victim-terrorism-expert-20141022-119x0z.html>

<sup>134</sup> Baryalei had links with some of Australia's most notorious foreign fighters, including Mohammed Elomar and Khaled Sharouff.

<sup>135</sup> See Appendix; Figures 22, 23.

<sup>136</sup> Taher (2014)

<sup>137</sup> Maher, S., 'From Portsmouth to Kobane: the British jihadis fighting for Isis,' *New Statesman*, November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2014, accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://www.newstatesman.com/2014/10/portsmouth-kobane>.

<sup>138</sup> Shiraz Maher interview with Ifthekar Jaman, Skype, 2013

and concluded that Shia's were a heretical sect who could not be considered real Muslims.<sup>139</sup> Fighting them was not only permissible, but a duty. He committed himself to travelling to Syria for the sake of jihad.

This was far from straightforward. Jaman lacked contacts and unsuccessfully tried to establish links with fighters from the UK for several months. Indeed, he even reached out to a number of charity and aid convoys that were travelling to the country in the hope they might facilitate his transfer to a jihadist group. He was turned down; his unfamiliarity with existing radical structures in the real world temporarily impeded his plans until Jaman decided to travel to the Syrian border alone and make connections there. Such innovation is generally rare, with the majority of the fighters lacking the strength of character to take such a bold move when still relatively young.

Telling his family he was enrolling on an Arabic course, Jaman flew to Antakya – a small Turkish town close to the Syrian border – and then took a bus to Reyhanli. It was on this journey that Jaman met a man from Aleppo entirely by chance and revealed his desire to wage jihad in Syria. He helped Jaman cross the Syrian border and took him to Aleppo where he had hoped to join Jabhat al-Nusra. "I looked around and I saw them raising the black flag everywhere," Jaman told Shiraz Maher, senior fellow at the ICSR. "People think it's the flag of al-Qaeda but, no, it's the flag of Islam."<sup>140</sup> Once in Aleppo Jaman was taken to a Jabhat al-Nusra recruitment office but was turned away. Again, Jaman's lack of contact with existing radical networks made it difficult for him to win the trust of groups fighting on the ground. No one could provide him with *tazkiyyah* however, and thus his sincerity remained unknown. Despite his best efforts, the lack of *tazkiyyah* meant Jaman was unable to join Jabhat al-Nusra. "I got teary. I was devastated. This is what I'd come for," Jaman said.<sup>141</sup> Islamic State was less concerned with Jaman's status and let him join without a reference. This is characteristic for the group, which has lower barriers to entry than many other militant organisations in Syria.

Jaman used the Internet to maintain regular and intense contact with a group of five friends in Portsmouth to whom he had grown particularly close in the year preceding his migration to Syria: his cousin, Asad Uzzaman; Muhammad Hamidur Rahman; Mamunur Roshid; Mashudur Choudhury; and, Mehdi Hassan. Jaman used Skype and WhatsApp to conduct private discussions with his friends about his experiences in Syria. Jaman encouraged his friends to join him and offered detailed instructions of what clothing to bring, how much money to carry, and logistics for crossing the border. Moreover, Jaman could now offer his friends a smoother and more considered plan for entering territory held by Islamic State by giving them *tazkiyyah*. This is the real significance of the offline peer-to-peer relationship here. By offering his friends a greater degree of information and knowledge, Jaman was able to lower the emotional and psychological barriers to participation. Having arranged *tazkiyyah* for the five Portsmouth men, Jaman gave them highly specific information about where to travel in Turkey in order to meet trusted fixers and transporters who would facilitate their transfer into Syria. In the event, he was even able to arrange for a truck to pick them up near the border.

<sup>139</sup> "This is the duty on me" – exclusive interview with 23-year-old British jihadi in Syria", BBC Newsnight, YouTube, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013, accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPTSw-cC4UQ>.

<sup>140</sup> Shiraz Maher interview with Ifthekar Jaman, Skype, 2013

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. (2013)

Meanwhile, in Manchester, another group of three men – Anil Khalil Raoufi, Mohammed Azzam Javeed, and Abu Qa'qaa (this is his nom de guerre; his real name is unknown) – were also being radicalised, in part, by Jaman's public propaganda. Abu Qa'qaa published a long explanation of his decision to travel to Syria in which he revealed that the group had been closely monitoring events on social media and had grown increasingly angry at the situation. They reconciled themselves to travelling but, much like Jaman, were unsure of how to reach Syria safely. After discussing it amongst themselves, the group were uninspired but decided to "rely on Allah alone," and resolved to make contacts whilst in Turkey. To this end, Qa'qaa admits to having been inspired by the teachings of the al-Qaeda ideologue Anwar al-Awlaki who had told his followers, "hijrah [migration] is like jumping off a cliff and not knowing what to expect at the bottom."

Unbeknown to Qa'qaa, both Raoufi and Javeed had decided not to delay their journey and bought airline tickets to Turkey. Although Qa'qaa did not have enough money for the journey, he was supported by Raoufi and Javeed who paid for his ticket. This incident again demonstrates the importance of peers in enabling their friends when at the tipping point between radicalisation and mobilisation. Once in Turkey the trio began reaching out to fighters in the hope of receiving *tazkiyyah*. It was impossible. Unknown to anyone inside the country, no one was prepared to vouch for them.

When the group contacted Ifthekar Jaman he was similarly unprepared to offer *tazkiyyah* for individuals who were entirely unknown to him, but engineered a plan to help the Manchester trio. He told them to wait in Turkey until his friends from Portsmouth arrived (who, by coincidence, were scheduled to arrive just a few days later). They would meet and vet the Manchester men. If they approved, Jaman would provide them with *tazkiyyah*.

In the event, the Portsmouth cluster was sufficiently reassured by the Manchester trio that they advised Ifthekar Jaman to provide *tazkiyyah*.<sup>142</sup> He did, and days later all the men were taken into Syria. This episode underscores the importance of offline interactions when winning trust because of the potential for ambiguity when solely interacting with others online. For the Manchester cluster this was vital and a necessary precursor to their arrival in Syria.

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<sup>142</sup> See Appendix; Figure 24

## Conclusion – Refocusing the Policy Debate

This report has attempted to provide a more nuanced understanding of the recruitment of British nationals to the 'Islamic State.' It has had two related objectives; to make clear the distinctions between radicalisation and recruitment with reference to the desires, decisions and actions of the recruit; and to provide a more nuanced understanding of the influence of the Internet on the mobilisation process as a whole. Without such distinctions, the investigations into the serious and complex issue of preventing foreign fighter recruitment devolves into misunderstandings that not only affect academic accuracy but, as has been highlighted, public policy.

The 'Internet causality' narrative has heavily affected the debate regarding the roles and responsibilities of governments and Internet companies. The narrative is at the heart of a conundrum, summarised by former Google executive Andrew McCaughlin in the following way:

*““You want to live in a world where people have access to news — in other words, documentary evidence of what is actually happening. And an ISIS video of hostages being beheaded is both an act of propaganda and is itself a fact. And so if you're a platform, you don't want to suppress the facts. On the other hand, you don't want to participate in advancing propaganda. And there is the conundrum.”<sup>143</sup>*

The situation has undoubtedly become more complex since the time of Osama Bin Laden, whose messages were smuggled out of the remote locations they were filmed in and couriered to Al Jazeera. Seeing the Internet as just a platform, even if exaggerated for satirical effect, seems increasingly disingenuous.<sup>144</sup> Even Bin Laden acknowledged this difference, stating in a letter found in his compound that “The wide-scale spread of jihadist ideology, especially on the Internet, and the tremendous number of young people who frequent the Jihadist Web sites [are] a major achievement for jihad.”<sup>145</sup>

If the freedom of speech versus security debate is not being placed in emotive, Orwellian language, it is invariably placed in black and white terms. For Wallace, who argues that Twitter's indirect promotion of violence and calls to violence is the equivalent of providing material support to terrorist organisations, concludes that if Internet companies are not willing to be part of the solution, they are part of the problem.<sup>146</sup> Twitter dissents by arguing that a distinction must be made between platform and content. Colin Crowell, the firm's head of global public policy, claims that the “key thing...is to recognize [Twitter's] role as the provider of this open platform for free expression . . . to recognize that that speech is not our own” and that a duty to respect and to defend those voices on the platform,” is crucial. “The platform of any debate is neutral. The platform doesn't take sides.”<sup>147</sup> The issue can be simplified down to philosophical and

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<sup>143</sup> Higham, S., Nakashima, E., ‘Why the Islamic State leaves tech companies torn between free speech and security,’ *The Washington Post*, July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015, accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/islamic-states-embrace-of-social-media-puts-tech-companies-in-a-bind/2015/07/15/0e5624c4-169c-11e5-89f3-61410da94eb1\\_story.html?postshare=7731437061049526](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/islamic-states-embrace-of-social-media-puts-tech-companies-in-a-bind/2015/07/15/0e5624c4-169c-11e5-89f3-61410da94eb1_story.html?postshare=7731437061049526)

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. (2015)

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. (2015)

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. (2015)

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. (2015)

practical considerations; first, should Internet companies curb the free speech of individuals by removing content? If yes, to what extent it is feasible to do so?

The problems with framing the issue in this way are profound, however. First, nobody wins; this report has illustrated that keeping the material online will undoubtedly have an effect on recruits, yet taking it down is also flawed. Not only is the process of removing Twitter accounts only marginally effective in reducing the overall noise of jihadist activity, it is not resource efficient while preventing concerned parties such as governments, academics and security analysts from learning about the conflict and studying its broader trends.<sup>148</sup>

While this report has highlighted the importance of this debate, the Internet's limitations have also been illustrated, with offline dynamics appearing crucial in the actual physical movement to the region. The Internet debate, while important, appears increasingly abstract and detached from the reality of how the mobilisation process works. Some of the attention must be refocused, then, on the traditional factors and mechanisms of mobilisation that exist in society rather than online.

Extremism, both its acts and ideas, can only be countered with civic engagement. As Nemr notes, facts don't matter to extremists.<sup>149</sup> Unpalatable ideas need to be made marginalised and made taboo for them not take root and spread, and this requires a civic, values based approach. Grassroots campaigns that take a holistic approach to countering extremism, that have a granular understanding of the dynamics on a local level, need to be empowered. An example would be the Active Change Foundation, based in East London. Started by Hanif Qadir, an ex-radical who fought in Afghanistan at the start of the 'War on Terror', the organisation has had great success in ingraining ideas of civic responsibility and positive values, such as leadership, in young people. The programmes they offer help those participating in learning valuable life skills, but also become a hub of values that slowly disseminate into the community at large. The success of these programs relies on trust, which needs time to build. The crisis in the Middle East, and thus the steady flow of radicalised migrants travelling to the region, shows no sign of abating. Unless governments take a proactive approach, the physical and political repercussions could be drastic.

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<sup>148</sup> See Berger, J.M., Morgan, J., 'ISIS Twitter Census', *The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World*, No, 20, March 2015.

<sup>149</sup> Nemr (2015).

**Allen, Juliet (PS/SP)**

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**From:** Kubicek, Brett (PS/SP)  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 16, 2016 5:56 PM  
**To:** Giroux2, Denis (PS/SP)  
**Subject:** FW: Timing  
**Attachments:** Canadian Update Document.docx; Canadian foreign fighter in Syria.docx

s.19(1)

**From:** Shiraz Maher [mailto: ]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 21, 2014 5:24 PM  
**To:** Kubicek, Brett  
**Subject:** Re: Timing

Hi Brett - document attached.

If you read the 'update' document first, then you'll see why I've attached the 'foreign fighter' document.

Please let me know if this is suitable otherwise I can rework it as need be.

Best,  
Shiraz.

On 21 January 2014 21:26, Kubicek, Brett <[Brett.Kubicek@ps-sp.gc.ca](mailto:Brett.Kubicek@ps-sp.gc.ca)> wrote:

Hello again Shiraz,

Sorry to nudge but big boss' office here is looking to set up a briefing, so just wanted to check when you might be able to send that wee update, so I can get back to them on timing...

Will you be able to hit send soon? Thanks in advance!

Best,

Brett.

**Brett Kubicek, PhD**

Manager, Research and Academic Relations | Gestionnaire, Recherche et relations académiques

Portfolio Affairs and Communications Branch | Secteur des affaires du portefeuille et des communications

**Public Safety Canada | Sécurité publique Canada**

Tel: 613.991.7779 | Fax: 613.954.3131 | [brett.kubicek@ps-sp.gc.ca](mailto:brett.kubicek@ps-sp.gc.ca)

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**DOCUMENT:** Ad hoc progress update

**PROJECT TITLE:** The Syrian Conflict: the evolution of al Qaeda and relate militant movements after the Arab Spring

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS:** Peter Neumann  
Shiraz Maher

**INSTITUTION:** International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), King's College London

**DATE:** 23 January 2014

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#### **BACKGROUND**

- This is an academic research project conducted by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), King's College London.
- The project is funded by Public Safety Canada through the Kanishka Project.
- The project formally commenced on 14 October 2013.
- As this document shows, the project has been formally run for only 3 months during which time we have generated a high degree of activity and laid the foundations on which a significant amount of research will be built.

#### **PROJECT PROGRESS TO DATE**

- ICSR has organised, and maintains, a database of Western foreign fighters, sympathisers, and their networks. This database lists:
  - 34 separate data points per fighter
  - Over 300 sympathisers, supporters, and fighters
  - 125 confirmed foreign fighters
- ICSR maintains separate databases of 'martyrs' or deaths in Syria which currently records over 1,100 deaths.
- These databases have already generated significant insights which have been shared with partners across multiple agencies and countries (an appendix of relevant meetings is attached).



- We have been offered, and are using, the pro bono services of Palantir, a software company which allows us to, inter alia, produce sophisticated network analysis maps of networks/organisations/individuals who are actively recruiting to, and promoting, the Syrian jihad.
- As stated in the original project proposal, ICSR has also secured ethical approval from the King's College London Research Ethics Committee. This ensures our research is guided and overseen by a rigorous ethical framework approved by the College.
- We have developed a working hypothesis of what we believe to be the key drivers and dynamics of radicalisation behind the current influx of Western Muslims into this conflict. These findings have been shared extensively with participants in some of our meetings (including with a number of stakeholders in Canada).

#### **OFFICIAL PUBLIC ENGAGEMENTS**

- Shiraz Maher was called to give evidence to the House of Commons, Home Affairs Select Committee on "counter-terrorism." This evidence session related specifically to the flow of British/European foreign fighters into Syria, and the potential long-term implications of the phenomenon.
- Shiraz Maher was called to give evidence to the House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee on "the crisis in Syria and the impact upon its neighbours" in December 2013.

#### **PUBLISHED PRELIMINARY RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS**

- A list of published preliminary research findings is given below.
- In April 2013, ICSR was the first research organisation to provide a credible and comprehensive estimate of the number of foreign fighters engaged in the Syrian conflict. (Our numbers were confirmed and adopted by several governments and the EU's Counterterrorism Coordinator). ***Please note: this was a research finding published/investigated before the current project was launched.***
- In October 2013, we published an overview of British foreign fighters in Syria, outlining their profiles and motivations.
- In November 2013, we documented a number of individual cases (here and here) of British foreign fighters in Syria, revealing that a much higher number than previously known had died in battle. (The Foreign and Commonwealth Office subsequently launched an official probe into the issue).

- That same month, we also published a list of urgent questions and concerns, which we believe Government needs to address in order to mitigate potential future risks from returning fighters. (These questions have since been put to senior government officials by Members of Parliament and the Home Affairs Select Committee).
- In December 2013, we published a new estimate, concluding that -- by then -- up to 11,000 non-Syrians (up to 2,000 Western Europeans) had gone to fight in Syria.

#### UNPUBLISHED RESEARCH ACTIVITY

- Not all research findings are published immediately, not least because many of them relate to fast moving events – some of which may involve ongoing or intended acts of criminality. In some circumstances, the immediate publishing of research findings would also compromise ongoing research. In such cases salient information is always shared with relevant parties as/when appropriate in a private fashion. This section outlines such cases.

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- We have uncovered information relating to the use of charities as a smokescreen to transfer foreign fighters and resources into the Syrian conflict.



#### UPCOMING RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS

- By March/April 2014, ICSR will release a research paper on the networks that are involved in facilitating and supporting European foreign fighter travel into Syria.
- By March/April 2014, ICSR will release a research paper on the networks that are involved in facilitating and supporting North American foreign fighter travel into Syria.
- In the summer we will launch a public website as a central academic resource for information about the conflict. We are currently exploring the most practical and impactful way to do this.

- A series of further deliverables are scheduled for the latter half of 2014 including a monograph and collected volume of essays.
- We also intend to visit Canada later in the year and share our research findings in person with relevant government departments, agencies, politicians, and other partners.

## **APPENDIX OF RELEVANT OFFICIAL MEETINGS RELATED TO SYRIA RESEARCH**

### **Canada**

Royal Canadian Mounted Police  
Canada Border Services Agency  
Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre (FINTRAC)  
Canadian Department of National Defence  
Defence Research and Development Canada  
Justice Canada

### **United States**

FBI  
Pentagon Joint Staff  
House of Representatives, Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittee  
House of Representatives, Homeland Security Subcommittee  
House of Representatives, Terrorism, Non-Proliferation, and Trade  
Subcommittee

### **United Kingdom**

The Security Service (Mi5)  
Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC)  
Home Affairs Committee  
Foreign Affairs Committee  
Metropolitan Police Service, Counter-Terrorism Command  
Metropolitan Police Service, Community liaison team (Syria)  
West Midlands Police, Counter-Terrorism Command  
Association of Chief Police Officers – Terrorism and Allied Matters (ACPO-TAM)  
Charity Commission

### **Germany**

Federal Intelligence Service (BND), *Bundesnachrichtendienst*

### **Belgium**

Belgian State Security Service (VSSE)  
Federal Counter-Terrorism Unit, Police

**Pages 45 to / à 46**  
**are withheld pursuant to section**  
**sont retenues en vertu de l'article**

**19(1)**

**of the Access to Information**  
**de la Loi sur l'accès à l'information**

## Allen, Juliet (PS/SP)

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**From:** Kubicek, Brett (PS/SP)  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 16, 2016 5:59 PM  
**To:** Giroux2, Denis (PS/SP)  
**Subject:** FW: Follow-up on Today's Call - Kings College London  
**Attachments:** Canada activity update.docx; Canada Extension Document 1.docx

**Brett Kubicek, PhD**

Manager, Research and Academic Relations | Gestionnaire, Recherche et relations académiques  
Portfolio Affairs and Communications Branch | Secteur des affaires du portefeuille et des communications

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s.19(1)

**From:** Shiraz Maher [<mailto:shiraz.maher@ps-sp.gc.ca>]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 11, 2015 1:38 PM  
**To:** Lively, Cassandra  
**Cc:** Partington, Neil; Kubicek, Brett; Martin, Connie  
**Subject:** Re: Follow-up on Today's Call - Kings College London

Hello all, sorry, getting sign-off has been like trying to juggle water. I attach two documents - Cassandra, can you please let me know what, if anything, further you require (I feel like I'm missing something).

On 23 February 2015 at 21:57, Lively, Cassandra <[Cassandra.Lively@ps-sp.gc.ca](mailto:Cassandra.Lively@ps-sp.gc.ca)> wrote:

Hello Shiraz,

It was very nice to meet you via telephone today!

As requested, below you will find the information we'll need to issue your 2014-15 funds, and address amending your agreement:

1- An Activity Report covering the period October 1, 2013 – December 31, 2014. This report does not need to be anything fancy, but must include the following info:

- A brief description of events related to the Project during the period covered by the report;
- The activities completed and results obtained with respect to the objectives of the project;
- Successes and difficulties encountered by project staff in achieving the objectives of the Project; and

- A brief description of the activities to be completed after your activity report, and any expected changes to your project's work plan. (This is taken from section C1, in Annex C of your original agreement).

2- On the financial side of things, we need to know if you expect to expend the total Public Safety Canada contribution to your project for the 2014-15 fiscal year, before March 31, 2015 (\$136,561). If you do expect to spend all of this money, and may require additional funds to fulfill the objectives of your project, please let us know and we can explore the possibility of amending your agreement to provide additional funds. Or, if you will be unable to expend all of the money, we could explore the possibility of moving those funds into the next fiscal year, and amending your agreement to extend the duration.

3- Either way, we need to update the deliverables table in your original contribution agreement (attached for easy reference above, and I've also attached the previous amendment to your project budget). Our finance folks will not allow us to release payment if a deliverable has not been completed before the end date listed in Annex A, in the project work plan. I've copied and pasted the table below, if you could propose any necessary changes in wording and completion dates, that would be great. Please feel free to do this as a reply to this email, and highlight any changes in a different font color ☺ Brett will get back to us on the restricted briefing paper issues as soon as possible.

#### Project Description/Work Plan:

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Deliverable	Clientele	Outputs	Date
Public Briefing paper "Western foreign fighters/Syria"	Government officials, academics, media	5,000 word paper to be published and disseminated by ICSR	03/14
	Canadian government officials	5,000 word paper produced exclusively for Canadian government	06/14
Online resource "Foreign fighters/Syria"	Government officials, academics, media	Searchable section of ICSR website, to be maintained throughout the project's duration	07/14
Research monograph "Syrian Militant Movements"	General public, government officials, academics, media	75,000 word monograph to be published by major academic publisher	12/14
Workshops and briefings on Syria in Ottawa, Canada	Government officials, academics, media	Minimum of half a dozen meetings with presentation and discussion of key findings	2/15
Special journal issue	General public, government officials, academics, media	20,000 word edited conference publication, or special issue of Democracy and Security	03/15

I think that covers everything, please let me know if you have any questions about any of this.

Thank you for your time,

*Cassandra Lively, MPA*

Project Manager | Gestionnaire de projet

Kanishka Project | Projet Kanishka  
Public Safety Canada | Sécurité publique Canada

**Telephone: 613-990-8417**

E-mail | Courriel: [Cassandra.Lively@ps-sp.gc.ca](mailto:Cassandra.Lively@ps-sp.gc.ca)

**Building a Safe and Resilient Canada**

**Bâtir un Canada sécuritaire et résilient**





## **ICSR UPDATE, MARCH 2015**

This has been one of the busiest times for ICSR since its inception in 2008, particularly due to events stemming from the Syria/Iraq conflict impacting heavily on our research into the Islamic State and the accompanying foreign fighter trend. In particular, the declaration of 'the new caliphate' by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the violent progression of Islamic State's presence into Iraq, the execution of journalists at the hands of a British foreign fighters and recent terrorist attacks in Ottawa, Sydney and Paris have all directly related to ICSR's workload.

## **KEY PUBLICATIONS**

### **REPORTS**

**WHERE THE INTERNET ENDS: THE LIMITS OF ONLINE RADICALISATION IN MOBILISING SYRIAN FOREIGN FIGHTER** (forthcoming, April 2015)

**THE 'FIXER NETWORK': HOW FOREIGN FIGHTERS JOIN MILITANT MOVEMENTS IN SYRIA** (forthcoming, April/May 2015)

**THE NEW JIHADISM: A GLOBAL SNAPSHOT (DECEMBER 2014):**  
(<http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/ICSR-REPORT-The-New-Jihadism-A-Global-Snapshot.pdf>)

**#GreenBirds: Measuring Importance and Influence in Syrian Foreign Fighter Networks** (April 2014):  
(<http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/ICSR-Report-Greenbirds-Measuring-Importance-and-Influence-in-Syrian-Foreign-Fighter-Networks.pdf>)

### **INSIGHTS**

**ICSR and BBC Publish Global Survey of Jihadist Violence** (December 2014):  
'The New Jihadism: A Global Snapshot' is project created by collaboration between ICSR and the BBC, with the aim of documenting all fatal jihadist attacks for the month of November 2014 from across the globe. These findings were subsequently analyzed to provide insight into the tactical capabilities of the groups involved, and the geographical distribution of these events for an accompanying report.  
<http://icsr.info/2014/12/icsr-bbc-publish-global-survey-jihadist-violence/>

**ICSR Insight: Guardian and ICSR Document British fighters killed in Syria/Iraq Conflict** (October 2014):  
ICSR collaborate with the Guardian newspaper to produce an interactive database of British fighters with Islamic State who have been killed in the Syria/Iraq conflict.  
<http://icsr.info/2014/10/icsr-insight-guardian-icsr-document-british-fighters-killed-syriairaq-conflict/>

**ICSR Advises U.N. Security Council on Foreign Fighters (September 2014):**

Professor Peter Neumann acts as senior advisor to the U.S. Mission and the U.N. Security Council, briefing them on the scale and nature of the foreign fighter movement in order to inform the development of domestic legislation.

<http://icsr.info/2014/09/icsr-advises-u-n-security-council-foreign-fighters/>

**ICSR Insight – Offering Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq a Way Out (August 2014):**

An update of the Syria team's research including numbers of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, a discussion of the motivations behind this jihadist movement in reference to British policy and suggestions for the consequences that might face these fighters upon their return.

<http://icsr.info/2014/08/icsr-insight-offering-foreign-fighters-syria-iraq-way/>

**ICSR Urges Caution Regarding “Abu Rashash” Social Media Accounts (June 2014):**

<http://icsr.info/2014/06/icsr-insight-icsr-urges-caution-regarding-abu-rashash-social-media-accounts/>

**Who Inspires the Syrian Foreign Fighters? (March 2014):**

The Syria team give a brief summary ahead of the launch of their #GreenBirds report in April 2014, discussing the impact of social media and naming highly influential figures around foreign fighter networks.

<http://icsr.info/2014/04/icsr-insight-inspires-syrian-foreign-fighters/>

**Blowback: How Assad Created His Jihadist Enemies (March 2014):**

<http://icsr.info/2014/03/icsr-insight-blowback-assad-created-jihadst-enemies/>

**What To Do About British Foreign Fighters in Syria (January 2014):**

A synopsis of evidence given in front of the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee, including advice on how to empower security agencies and reconfiguration of the Channel Project.

<http://icsr.info/2014/01/icsr-insight-british-foreign-fighters-syria/>

**Up to 11,000 Foreign Fighters in Syria; Steep Rise Among Western Europeans (December 2014):**

An update on numbers monitored by ICSR's database as well as specific information on donor countries and patterns.

<http://icsr.info/2013/12/icsr-insight-11000-foreign-fighters-syria-steep-rise-among-western-europeans/>

**Syrian Foreign Fighters: 10 Questions for Government (November 2013):**

Peter Neumann poses ten questions to the FCO and other arms of the British Government on the subject of radicalization in the Syrian conflict.

<http://icsr.info/2013/11/syrian-foreign-fighters-10-questions-government/>

**ICSR Identifies Briton Killed Fighting in Syria (November 2013):**

<http://icsr.info/2013/11/insight-icsr-identifies-briton-killed-fighting-syria/>

**British Foreign Fighters in Syria (October 2013):**

Insight provides a comprehensive and updated profile of the 'British Foreign Fighter', discusses possible motivations and practical arrangements for travel to Syria, as well as detailing the affiliation of currently active groups.

<http://icsr.info/2013/10/british-foreign-fighters-in-syria/>

## SELECTED OP-EDS

### **From Portsmouth to Kobane: the British jihadis fighting for Isis (November, 2014)**

A long essay examining the trajectory of a cluster of young men from both Portsmouth and Manchester who migrated to Syria and joined Islamic State. This story is based on extensive, in-depth interviews with the fighters themselves to better understand their motivations and experiences.

<http://www.newstatesman.com/2014/10/portsmouth-kobane>

### **'From Bin Laden to Isis: Why the roots of jihadi ideology run deep in Britain' (September 2014)**

An examination of how and why Islamic State is so capable of marketing itself to some young British Muslims.

<http://www.newstatesman.com/2014/08/bin-laden-s-final-triumph>

### **'Blowback: Who are ISIS and why are young Brits fighting with them?' (June 2014):**

An extensive overview of recent territorial gains made by ISIS in Iraq and the implications of this mobilization for renewed sectarian warfare, the foreign fighter phenomenon and jihadi group politics.

<http://www.newstatesman.com/uk-politics/2014/06/blowback-who-are-isis-and-why-are-young-brits-fighting-them>

### **'Analyzing the ISIS "Twitter Storm" (June 2014):**

Shiraz Maher & Joseph Carter dissect the #AllEyesonISIS social media storm using Palantir Torch technology for War on the Rocks blog, shedding light on the jihadi twitter-sphere in terms of social network analysis.

<http://warontherocks.com/2014/06/analyzing-the-isis-twitter-storm/>

### **'Suspects into Collaborators' (April 2014)**

Peter Neumann argues that Assad has himself to blame

<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v36/n07/peter-neumann/suspects-into-collaborators>

### **'Taking radicalised children from their parents is a dangerous idea' (March 2014):**

Shiraz Maher discusses the implications of comments made by London Mayor Boris Johnson on plans to remove radicalized children from their family environment, arguing that parents can embody the principal antidote to extremist views.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/mar/03/radicalised-children-parents-boris-johnson-radicalisation-muslim-extremism>

## MEETINGS WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS

### OFFICIAL PUBLIC ENGAGEMENTS WITH GOVERNMENT

- **Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition, Rt Hon Ed Miliband** (March 2015)  
Shiraz Maher and Peter Neumann advised the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition, Rt Hon Ed Miliband, about policy and intervention options relating to the Syrian conflict
- **White House Summit** (February 2015)  
Peter Neumann participated in the White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism and gave a speech on the topic of foreign fighters in Syria.
- **Munich Security Conference** (January 2015)  
Peter Neumann participated in the Munich Security Conference where ICSR released updated figures for the number of foreign fighters believed to be in Syria.
- **Briefing Norwegian Prime Minister** (January 2015)  
Peter Neumann was part of an academic delegation which advised the Norwegian Prime Minister about the threat of returning fighters from the Syrian conflict.
- **Swedish Democrats** (January 2015)  
Shiraz Maher advised the Swedish Democrats about passing legislation to deal with the threat from foreign fighters.
- **10 Downing Street Policy unit** (numerous meetings, September 2014 – Present)  
Both Peter Neumann and Shiraz Maher have repeatedly been invited to 10 Downing Street to advise the Prime Minister's policy unit on security and counter-terrorism measures relating to the Syrian conflict.
- **Deputy Prime Minister's Policy Unit** (numerous meetings, September 2014 – Present)  
Shiraz Maher has repeatedly consulted with the Deputy Prime Minister's policy unit to discuss the forthcoming counter-terrorism Bill in parliament.
- **Shadow Cabinet** (numerous meetings, September 2014 – Present)  
Peter Neumann has repeatedly met with the shadow cabinet to discuss aspects of the proposed counter-terrorism Bill, and has also advised on security issues relating to the rise of jihadist groups in Syria/Iraq.

### PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES

- **Intelligence and Security Committee** (November 2014)  
Peter Neumann gave oral evidence to the Intelligence and Security Committee in parliament regarding returnees from the Syrian conflict.
- **House of Commons Defence Committee** (October 2014)  
Shiraz Maher was invited to give evidence to the Defence Affairs Committee regarding foreign fighters in Syria.
- **House of Commons Home Affairs Committee** (January 2014)  
Shiraz Maher gave oral evidence given to the UK Home Affairs Committee on the

subject of the Syrian foreign fighter movement. This evidence, along with intelligence provided by ICSR, featured prominently in the Home Affairs Committee's 17<sup>th</sup> annual counter-terrorism report of 2013/2014.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmhaff/c231-v/c23101.htm>

- **House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee** (December 2013)  
Shiraz Maher gave oral evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee on the topic of "The crisis in Syria and the impact upon its neighbours."  
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/foreign-affairs-committee/news/syria-session-10-dec-13/>

## **INTERNATIONAL BODIES & GOVERNMENTS**

### **United Nations Security Council** (September 2014)

Peter Neumann served as a Senior Advisor to the United States Mission and the UN Security Council on Syrian foreign fighters.

### **Embassies of Israel, Australia, Canada, United States, Japan, Norway, Germany** (various meetings, August 2014 – Present)

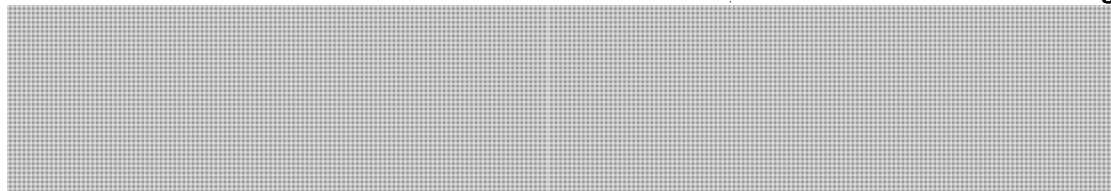
Various members of our team have, at different times, met with and advised representatives from all of the governments listed above. In many cases, this has been in multiple meetings.

## **MISCELLANEOUS PUBLIC MEETINGS**

- In March, the Syria team attended a meeting with the Home Affairs Committee on the subject of foreign fighters in Syria, the threat they may pose to UK national security and projections for future policy development. ICSR also provide vital information to the Metropolitan Police, Yorkshire Police and West Midlands Police regarding these issues, as well as sharing insight on the path of foreign fighters to Syria by aid convoy with the UK Charity Commission.
- The ICSR Syria team has met on numerous occasions with members of the Canadian government since September 2013, including; Canadian Security Intelligence Service, Canadian Public Safety board, Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Canada Border Services Agency, FINTRAC and the Department of National Defence.
- In July 2014, ICSR met with the UK Ministry of Defense to discuss and advise methods for collecting and analyzing open-source data on foreign fighters from the West.
- Peter Neumann conducted a series of meetings in New York and Washington D.C. with the Truman Security Network, Department of Homeland Security, State Department, and SOCOM (Special Operations Command).

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est retenue en vertu des articles**

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**of the Access to Information  
de la Loi sur l'accès à l'information**

## **SELECTED PUBLIC EVENTS**

We have spoken at literally hundreds of events in line with our aims of educating the public about terrorism and foreign policy matters. Below is a very select list of a few events we have conducted.

**ICSR Briefing (June 2014):**

Discussion attended by academics, journalists and political risk representatives on field observations from the Syria research team's recent trip to the Turkey-Syria border, as well as an update on the foreign fighter database membership and affiliations.

<http://icsr.info/2014/06/8939/>

**ICSR #GreenBirds Report launch event (April 2014)**

Official paper launch of our report.

**The Current Terrorist Threat in the United States and Beyond (January 2014)**

**Frontline Club (September 2013):**

Shiraz Maher discusses the implications of non-intervention in Syria in a sold-out seminar at the Frontline Club.

<http://www.frontlineclub.com/intervening-in-syria-not-another-iraq-or-afghanistan/>

## SELECTED MEDIA APPEARANCES

ICSR's Syria team regularly engages in mutual information exchanges with, and provides appearances for, national and international news outlets including; BBC, ITV, Sky and CNN.

HardTalk: An Interview with Shiraz Maher (BBC Persia, April 2014):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvAMoKKyWyE>

Syria Jihadist Training 'worst since Afghanistan in 1980s' (CNN, June 2014):

Peter Neumann discusses the foreign fighter training process live on CNN Amanpour, providing updates on numbers from the ICSR database and comparing the Syrian phenomenon with the foreign fighter mobilization in Afghanistan during the 1980s.

<http://amanpour.blogs.cnn.com/2014/06/03/syria-jihadist-training-worst-since-afghanistan-in-1980s/>

'Social media used to recruit new wave of British jihadists in Syria' (The Guardian, April 2014):

The Guardian chronicles the work of ICSR's Syria team on the Internet, social media and foreign fighter networks active within Syria ahead of the #GreenBirds report.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/15/social-media-recruit-british-jihadis-syria-twitter-facebook>

<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/video/2014/apr/15/jihad-syria-social-media-video>

Peter Neumann discuss the threat that ISIS poses to the West on Sky News (November 2013):

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPDz1N4I\\_GY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPDz1N4I_GY)

Briton 'doing his duty' by fighting for group linked to al-Qaeda in Syria (November 2013):

ICSR's Syria team facilitates contact between BBC Newsnight and a well-known British foreign fighter for a collaborative case-study based feature on the subject of motivation.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-25022097>



## **UPCOMING ACTIVITES OVER THE NEXT THREE MONTHS**

ICSR's Syria team is currently working on three upcoming reports.

1. An exploration of the convergence of online and offline communities in facilitating a foreign fighter's journey to Syria and their subsequent group affiliation.
2. A profile of foreign fighters from North America – who they are and how they go. We also explore what differences and similarities exist between those who go from Europe and North America.
3. We will expose the route and networks that practically allow someone to get from Europe – and Britain in particular – into Syria.

Upcoming public events include:

1. Presentation of our findings at the IDC Herzliya conference in Israel.
2. Presentation of our findings to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ministry at the prestigious annual Henriette van Lynden lecture series.
3. Presentation of findings at Singapore Centre of Excellence for National Security.
4. Further meetings lined up for briefings with HMG departments including the Home Office, Ministry of Defence, and Defence Science and Technology Laboratory.

Template to assist with amending your contrition agreement – please save, complete sections highlighted in yellow, and send back to me as soon as possible ☺ Thank you! Cassandra

1. Please provide me with a short narrative (no more than a paragraph or two) explaining why you are required to extend your agreement into the next fiscal year. For example, I know staff turnover is one reason we discussed. How much additional time do you need?

There are two primary reasons we require a no-cost extension to our agreement. These are follows:

- Since starting the project, ICSR has sought to bring a high degree of social science rigor to the process of studying the Syrian conflict. This is because we believe an empirical base is important for informing our study, rather than just anecdotal evidence. Our database is, arguably, the best and largest of its kind anywhere in the world and is bringing forward important results for a number of interested parties – including the Canadian government. Building this digital infrastructure has been far more time consuming and exhaustive than we anticipated (there is no precedent for it). While this has delayed us, we have now collected a huge amount of data and are therefore proceeding with using this to produce highly detailed and informed reports.
- Staff turnover (70% of the team have moved on to new opportunities!) has impacted in our ability to meet previously anticipated deadlines.

We therefore request a no-cost extension on deliverables.

2. Below, if applicable, please type in the revised budget number next to the number currently approved in your amended contribution agreement. Are you able to spend all of your budget for 2014-15? Could you potentially spend more money, if funds are available? How much additional funding do you require for 2015-16?:

**Eligible Expenses for Fiscal Year  
2014 - 2015**

<b>DETAILED CASH ELIGIBLE EXPENSES</b>		
Detailed *Eligible Expenditures, according to Program T&C Categories	Currently approved Public Safety Canada Funding	Revised budget (decrease or increase )
Salaries and wages	\$120,862.33	No change
Travel (field work)	\$7,000.00	No change
Public awareness and educational activities	\$5,000.00	No change
Office space costs	\$3,698.67	No change
Sub-Total – Cash	\$136,561.00	No change

**Proposed Eligible Expenses for Fiscal Year  
2015 - 2016**

**PROPOSED CASH ELIGIBLE EXPENSES**

Template to assist with amending your contrition agreement – please save, complete sections highlighted in yellow, and send back to me as soon as possible © Thank you! Cassandra

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Detailed *Eligible Expenditures, according to Program T&C Categories	
Salaries and wages	No additional funds requested
Travel (field work)	No additional funds requested
Public awareness and educational activities	No additional funds requested
Office space costs	No additional funds requested
Sub-Total – Cash	No additional funds requested

3. Using tracked changes, please edit the Project Description/Workplan table from Annex A of your original contribution agreement, as required. Please note that if deliverables are not completed by the dates of completion listed, our finance folks will not allow us to release payment for your file:

Deliverable	Clientele	Outputs	Date
Public Briefing paper “Western foreign fighters/Syria”	Government officials, academics, media	5,000 word paper to be published and disseminated by ICSR	03/14 Delivered
	Canadian government officials	5,000 word paper produced exclusively for Canadian government	05/15
Online resource “Foreign fighters/Syria”	Government officials, academics, media	Searchable section of ICSR website, to be maintained throughout the project’s duration	06/15
Research monograph “Syrian Militant Movements”	General public, government officials, academics, media	75,000 word monograph to be published by major academic publisher	12/15
Workshops and briefings on Syria in Ottawa, Canada	Government officials, academics, media	Minimum of half a dozen meetings with presentation and discussion of key findings	03/15 SM has already done some meetings and we will come again in March 2015.
Special journal issue	General public, government officials, academics, media	20,000 word edited conference publication, or	03/15 We require some guidance from you on this one. We were originally

Template to assist with amending your contrition agreement – please save, complete sections highlighted in yellow, and send back to me as soon as possible ☺ Thank you! Cassandra

		special issue of Democracy and Security	going to produce this based on a conference (for which we originally budgeted – but which was then taken out of the budget). I'm not sure how we can produce this without a conference. (That said, please see below and maybe we can do a swap?)
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In addition to the deliverables above, for no additional cost, but based on our extensive database, we are producing at least two extra 10,000 word papers on the following issues:

- The interplay between online and 'real world' radicalization. We explore the role of peer pressure and socialization networks in mobilizing people for jihad
- Explaining the 'facilitation' network in Turkey which practically allows foreign fighters to join jihadist groups.

## Allen, Juliet (PS/SP)

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**From:** Peter.Ottis@international.gc.ca  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 16, 2016 7:50 AM  
**To:** Kubicek, Brett (PS/SP); Waintraub, Michelle (PS/SP)  
**Cc:** Artur.Wilczynski@international.gc.ca; Marie-Josée.Rheaume@international.gc.ca;  
Bjorn.Hernes@international.gc.ca  
**Subject:** Follow up to your visit  
**Attachments:** IB\_OSLO-#39005-v1-OSLGR CVE Court Call National Police Commissioner 2015....docx;  
IB\_OSLO-#39004-v1-OSLGR CVE Court Call Min of Justice 2015-11-17.docx

Hello Brett and Michelle!

I hope this email finds you safely back in Ottawa. Here are a couple of points that came out of the meetings:

- 1) I've forwarded links to the last CSIS AO reports to the two guests from Wednesday's lunch.
- 2) I've forwarded Bjorn-Petter Tore Bjorgo's interest in possible academic collaboration, so we can follow up on that.
- 3) As per your request, I am attaching the meeting reports for two of the courtesy calls we did last fall in relation to our CVE event. Let me know if you have any questions on the content.

Kind regards,

Peter Ottis  
Foreign Policy and Diplomacy Service | Service de la Politique et de la Diplomatie  
peter.ottis@international.gc.ca  
Telephone | Téléphone : +47 22 99 53 36  
Facsimile | Télécopieur : +47 22 99 53 01  
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Global Affairs Canada | Affaires mondiales Canada  
Government of Canada | Gouvernement du Canada



Global Affairs  
Canada

Affaires mondiales  
Canada

## **CVE-RELATED COURTESY CALLS – FALL 2015**

### **MEETING #2 – NATIONAL POLICE DIRECTORATE**

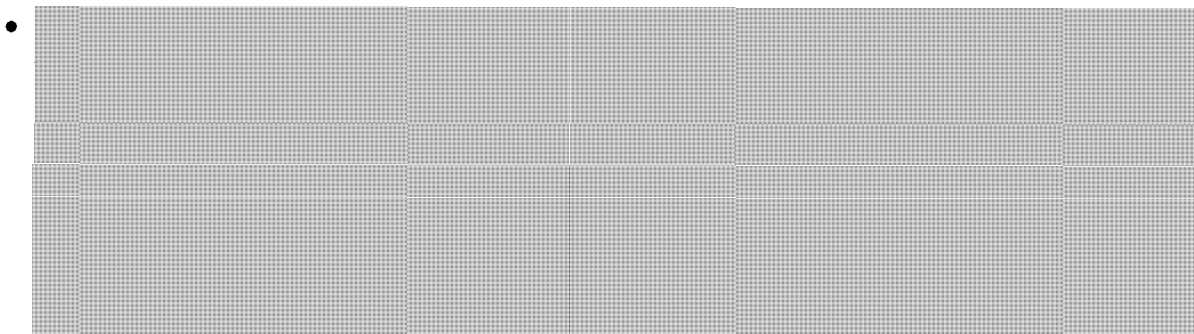
**Date:** 2015-11-19 – 1430 hours

**Place:** Fritjof Nansensvei 14 (Majorstuen)

### **RE: COURTESY CALL WITH NATIONAL POLICE COMMISSIONER HUMLEGÅRD**

#### **Overview of bilateral relationship**

- Commissioner Humlegård began the meeting by commenting on the warm relationship he has had with Canadian police counterparts. In particular, Com. Humlegård is well acquainted with former Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair from the 'Pearls in Policing' working group.
- HOM provided an overview of the mission's CVE event, highlighting the excellent working level meetings at the National Police Directorate.



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#### **Overview of Norwegian Police**

- As of 2016-01-01, Norway will go from 27 to 12 police districts. Though the move was met with resistance from local politicians, the consolidation was widely supported by the national government and police alike. This move was one of the key recommendations that came out of the 7/22 Report (the independent report following the 2011 terror attacks). By decreasing the number of police districts, the police plans to significantly increase the tactical capability of each district.
- Although the 7/22 report was very critical of the police, it also revealed that there is virtually no corruption in Norwegian police, the public has very high trust in the police and that the corps has high academic standards. Every Norwegian police officer must have a three year degree from the Police University College, which is very competitive. Every year some 5000 students apply for 700 spots; 20% of all applicants already hold a bachelor degree from another institution. For six years running, police prosecutor has been the most popular career choice for Norwegian law graduates.

- The Norwegian police see law enforcement as just a small portion of what the service does. As a result, they encourage officers to take a mid-career break and pursue a wide range of career options before returning to the service. Commissioner Humlegård spent several years at Det Norske Veritas (DNV-GL); Commissioner Smedsrud has a law degree and worked as a full time lawyer several years back.

### Current challenges

Com. Humlegård listed two major challenges facing Norwegian police:

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- 2) New ICT Initiatives: Norwegian police is looking to leverage technology in concert with the police district amalgamation. The overriding motto is "fewer police buildings, greater police presence". The police plans to establish an inter-connected, structured database with a mobile portal that will allow police officers to draft reports remotely and spend more time on the road. The new solution was launched in three police districts and has thus far been deemed an overwhelming success.

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### Norwegian police international presence

- The Norwegian police aim to have 1% of its force abroad, whether in a liaison or training capacity. Norway has been a very active contributor to Interpol and UN police training missions. Norwegian officers are working at the new Interpol office in Singapore, and have most recently trained local services in Liberia, Hebron and South Sudan. Norway has been lauded internationally for its high level of police training in these missions. In addition, the four Nordic European nations have a robust exchange program where police and customs officers are seconded between forces.

### Action Item

- Commissioner Humlegård was very excited at the prospect of meeting with senior Canadian police and security officers should the opportunity arise in the new year.

### Attendees

Odd Reidar Humlegård  
Knut Smedsrud  
Kaare Songstad  
Artur Wilczynski

National Police Commissioner  
Police Commissioner  
Head of Contingency Department  
Ambassador

National Police Directorate  
National Police Directorate  
National Police Directorate  
Embassy of Canada to Norway

**Peter Ottis**

**FPDS Assistant**

**Embassy of Canada to Norway**

**Drafted: OSLO/Ottis**

**Consulted: OSLO/Rhéaume**

**Approved:**



## **CVE-RELATED COURTESY CALLS – FALL 2015**

### **MEETING #1 – MINISTRY OF JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SECURITY**

**Date:** 2015-11-17 – 1300 hours

**Place:** Gullhaug Torg 4 (Nydalen)

#### **RE: COURTESY CALL WITH MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SECURITY**

##### **Overview of bilateral relationship**

- HOM highlighted that Norway and Canada have cooperated closely in the past on security issues.
- Minister Anundsen reiterated this close cooperation and focussed on information sharing in particular as a cornerstone of close cooperation.

##### **Overview of Canadian election**

- HOM provided a brief overview of the Canadian election. In particular, Minister Anundsen was given a more detailed background on his two Canadian counterparts: Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould and Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale.
- In regards to the direction of the government, HOM advised that the new government has published its mandate letters online.


##### **Overview of Norwegian political situation**

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##### **Norwegian foreign fighters, radicalization and radicalization prevention**

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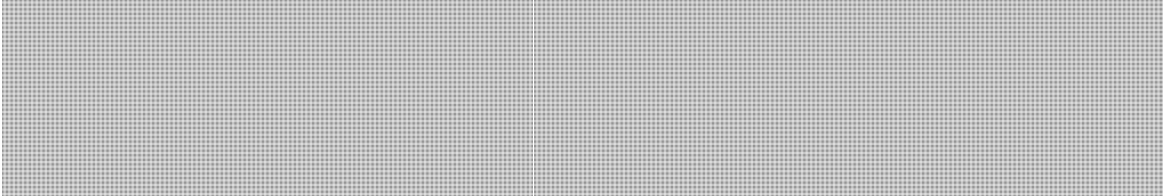
- 
- Last year the Ministry of Justice published its Action Plan against radicalization and extremist violence. This whole-of-government approach has been well received by national interlocutors. The Minister considers it a robust framework for cooperation between government organizations at different levels, as well as non-governmental organizations.
- The government will soon launch a new research centre focussing on Far Right extremism and violence. (A few days after the meeting it was announced that the University of Oslo will receive 50 million NOK to open the Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX). Tore Bjørge, one of Norway's most authoritative researchers on Far Right radicalization, was appointed as the centre's director.)

##### **Update on migrant crisis**

*(previously sent under separate cover as OSLO-152)*

- If current trends continue, Norway will receive 120,000 refugees by the end of 2016. The volume of arrivals has placed significant strain on the government trying to handle the logistics of processing, transporting, housing and feeding these asylum seekers. Many of the steps taken up to now (such as housing asylum seekers in off-season tourist hotels) are understood to only provide a short-term solution. Parties on both sides of the aisle agree that in the long term, a different, more sustainable solution has to be found.

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- On Monday, 2015-11-16, 64 asylum seekers crossed the border in Storskog, East Finnmark; there have been as many as 197 persons arriving per day. As of last week, more than 50% of the asylum seekers were coming from Afghanistan, followed by arrivals from Syria, Egypt and Somalia.

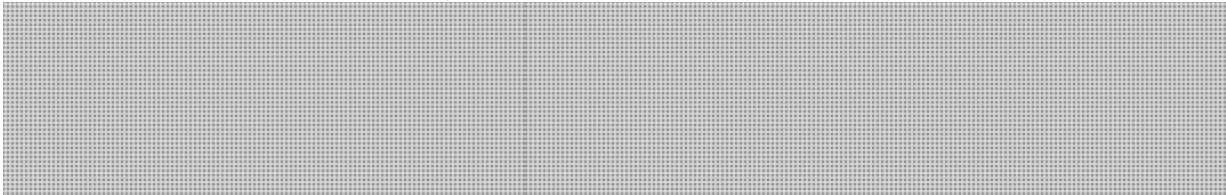
- The government introduced a new bill last week (OSLO148 refers), which has had its first reading on Monday, 2015-11-16 and second reading on Thursday, 2015-11-19. The bill aims to streamline the deportation of asylum claimants with work / study / residence visas in Russia. At the moment, these arrivals undergo the complete screening and evaluation process before they are deemed ineligible. Under the new law, these asylum seekers would be turned around straight at the border. The Minister stated that if these Afghan asylum seekers cannot be returned to Russia, they will be sent to Afghanistan.

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Second, Norway will remove the requirement for the return country to prove that it has the capability to process refugee applications in an orderly fashion. This has been one of the roadblocks for returning asylum seekers to Russia. Third, the government is proposing detaining failed asylum seekers before deportation. All of the above provisions have majority support in the Parliament with a two year sunset clause.

- The Ministry of Justice and Public Safety has taken the lead role in handling the refugee crisis. The department has had very good cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in deporting ineligible asylum seekers to Afghanistan and Pakistan. In regards to returns to other countries, this has been a very politically sensitive topic in Norway.

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- Norway has not seen a significant change in its threat assessment as a result of the refugee crisis. Norway has recently lowered its threat assessment and gone back to de-arming its police officers. (Norwegian police had previously been armed as an emergency measure following a specific threat in July 2014.)

#### **Attendees**

Anders Anundsen	Minister	Ministry of Justice and Public Security
Elin Solberg	Special Director Radicalization and Violent Extremism	Ministry of Justice and Public Security
Andreas Skulberg	Deputy Director General – Correctional Services Department	Ministry of Justice and Public Security
Siv Tone Syversen-Nordberg	Assistant Chief of Police - The Police Department	Ministry of Justice and Public Security
Artur Wilczynski	Ambassador	Embassy of Canada to Norway
Peter Ottis	FPDS Assistant	Embassy of Canada to Norway

Drafted: OSLO/Ottis

Consulted: OSLO/Rhéaume

Approved: OSLO/Wilczynski

## Allen, Juliet (PS/SP)

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**From:** Kubicek, Brett (PS/SP)  
**Sent:** Saturday, January 16, 2016 4:20 PM  
**To:** Goodyear, Lori (PS/SP)  
**Subject:** FW: Kanishka Evaluation - Request for documents  
**Attachments:** ICSR Draft Final Report.docx; PS-SP-#1730990-1-KPCP - List of Events.DOCX; PS-SP-#1308963-4A-KPCP - Project Highlights.DOCX; PS-SP-#1731017-v1-KPCP\_Working\_Groups\_-\_Table\_of\_Meetings.DOCX

FYI

---

**From:** Giroux2, Denis (PS/SP)  
**Sent:** Friday, January 15, 2016 3:32 PM  
**To:** McLaughlin, Julie (PS/SP)  
**Cc:** Assadi2, Bahman (PS/SP); Kubicek, Brett (PS/SP); Martin, Connie (PS/SP)  
**Subject:** RE: Kanishka Evaluation - Request for documents

Hi Julie,

Here is some information related to that request, which should respond to the bulk of your questions. In the next few days, Brett may be bringing new comments and will provide the remainder of the requested information.

So, I've attached the Kanishka Highlights document (of which you had an earlier version), which should respond to items 1A to 1G; a list of all Kanishka events (supplement for item 1G); and another attachment that contains the info you need for item 2.

For item 1H (on the Community of Science and Practice):

The Kanishka Project aims to increase the knowledge base about terrorism and counter-terrorism, but goes beyond simply studying terrorism, as many of the studies are developing and testing new approaches to support more effective policies, tools and resources for law enforcement and people on the front lines.

The initiative has aimed to rapidly and significantly expand research capacity outside government, ensure that focus is on relevant questions, and make the results available for those who need them, in the right form and at the right time. This capacity-building emphasis was designed to generate important new knowledge in the short term, and create a sufficiently strong core and momentum for ongoing, long-term improvement.

Prior to the Kanishka Project, a fundamental problem was that there were few scholars focusing on relevant questions, those involved were largely isolated from one another, and the research was of limited interest to practitioners. There was no community of science for researchers focusing on counter-terrorism relevant to the Canadian context. To improve the knowledge base in support of more effective counter-terrorism, however, a community of practice is also important, reflecting the parallel idea that there needs to be a critical mass of perspectives from policy, program and civil society circles to share lessons and challenge assumptions.

For item I (Syria Conflict), there are several deliverables. We have a draft of the final report as well; it should be published late this month or sometime next month. As part of this study they have also published:

- <http://icsr.info/2014/04/icsr-insight-inspires-syrian-foreign-fighters/>
- <http://icsr.info/2015/10/icsr-report-victims-perpetrators-assets-narratives-islamic-state-defectors/>

- And this study was produced based on the data from our funded study, and is considered a deliverable:  
<http://icsr.info/2015/06/icsr-report-till-martyrdom-us-part-gender-isis-phenomenon/>
- This web resource: <https://icsrforeignfighters.wordpress.com/>

More info to follow, some of which you'll receive over Dragon.

Best,

**Denis**

[Denis.Giroux2@canada.ca](mailto:Denis.Giroux2@canada.ca)  
613-949-5728

---

**From:** McLaughlin, Julie (PS/SP)  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 05, 2016 10:52 AM  
**To:** Kubicek, Brett (PS/SP); Lively, Cassandra (PS/SP)  
**Cc:** Assadi2, Bahman (PS/SP)  
**Subject:** Kanishka Evaluation - Request for documents

Good morning,

I hope you had good Holidays.

Would it be possible to provide us with the following information and documentation:

- 1) An update on the Kanishka Project – Key achievements to date (an update on the Project Highlights that you provided –doc #1308963), in particular:
  - a. Total amount of investment to date;
  - b. # of total projects and # of projects completed;
  - c. # of workshops and research symposiums etc. hosted;
  - d. # of websites etc. developed;
  - e. # of research studies contracted directly by PS, including # of studies that are completed;
  - f. # of student projects funded;
  - g. # and nature of other events hosted;
  - h. Some background and more concrete performance information on the Community of Science and Practice, if available;
  - i. A copy of the ICSR study entitled "The Syria Conflict: the Evolution of al Qaeda and other Militant Movements after the Arab Spring"; and perhaps, all reports that are not publicly available;
  - j. Any other documents that potentially discusses the need for having an Initiative such as Kanishka, including any new MCs or other inception documents.

- 2) We would also like to get the following information on various management committees:

Working Group	Frequency of meeting	# of times has met over the past five years	Are there records of decisions (can we have access to these, if required)
Steering Committee			
Working Group			
Advisory Group			

We would appreciate if you could provide this information by **January 15**.

Please let us know if you have any questions.

Thank you

**Julie McLaughlin**

Evaluator | Évaluatrice

Internal Audit and Evaluation Directorate | Direction générale de la vérification interne et de l'évaluation

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**Pages 72 to / à 103**

**are duplicates**

**sont des duplicatas**

## **Kanishka Project – List of Events**

**Updated January 2016**

1. Kanishka London Symposium – December 14-15, 2015 (London, UK)
2. Workshop on Behaviour patterns of lone actor terrorists, solo actors, and mass casualty shooters (Gill/Corner/Amarasingam ) – December 2015
3. Open Source Intelligence Workshop – November 2015
4. Radicalization and Violent Extremism: Lessons Learned from Canada, the UK and the US - July 2015 (Washington, DC)
5. TSAS Chatham House Event with Dr. Nico Prucha on Counter-Narratives – June 2015
6. Kanishka Project Research Affiliate Program Workshop – March 2015
7. Kanishka Project Symposium on Social Media and Online Analytics – March 2015
8. Children & Youth in Challenging Contexts (CYCC) Network and Wisdom2Action Calgary - "Best Practices to Promote the Resilience of Youth Against Violent Extremism" (funding through contribution program) – March 2015
9. Metropolis Pre-forum: Kanishka Project Symposium (17<sup>th</sup> National Metropolis Conference) – March 2015
10. Kanishka Project Symposium on Community-Based Research – Feb 2015
11. Symposium on Early Intervention models for preventing violent extremism (Khan/Kohler/Vidino) – December 2014
12. Kanishka Project Research Affiliate Program Event – March 2014
13. CIDB Database Event – March 2014
14. Kanishka Project Sessions at the 16<sup>th</sup> National Metropolis Conference – March 2014 (RDIMS#1057916)
15. Air India Families' Event – Feb 2014
16. Interdepartmental workshop to examine connections between research on hate speech and preventing/responding to violent extremism – June 2013
17. Kanishka retreat of officials and key subject matter experts to conduct a mid-term progress review of Kanishka, as well as the state of terrorism research and the threat picture more generally, to help focus priorities and operation of the program – June 2013
18. Ottawa – breakfast session for Minister of Public Safety with Kanishka graduate student Research Affiliate Program award winners, along with select Kanishka-funded scholars – April 2013
19. Ottawa series of events on risk and resilience at Metropolis conference including plenary 'Understanding risk and fostering resilience in a diverse society', as well as workshops – March 2013



20. Organizational and funding support for NS Policy led international Symposium on Measuring Effectiveness of Countering Violent Extremism Programming which featured several Kanishka-supported researchers – March 2013
21. Kanishka Opening Conference – November 2012
22. Montreal/Quebec Metropolis Centre 'justice, policing and security' capstone event – November 2012
23. Ottawa universities collaborative research design workshop for researchers and officials – September 2012
24. Ottawa Kanishka collaborative research design symposium for researchers and officials – May 2012
25. UBC workshop on migration and security, and research network development workshop – April 2012
26. Metropolis Toronto pre-conference: 'Fear and Polarization: What can we learn from Europe?', a plenary on resilience, multiple workshops, and a keynote by the Minister of Public Safety – Feb 2012
27. Information session for families of Air India victims on Kanishka and the ex gratia payment program – January 2012
28. DM-level policy conversation, and working level roundtable with scholars and officials on countering violent extremism (co-host with NS Policy) – January 2012
29. Multiple engagement sessions with individual researchers to discuss their Kanishka research – including for multiple meetings of the Cross Cultural Roundtable on Security – or research related to Kanishka to gauge if of relevance to Canadian policy and program needs on counter-terrorism (estimate well over 20)

### **Kanishka Project - Key Achievements to Date:**

- Kanishka Project has invested over \$6.7 million through the contribution mechanism for 37 projects, 23 of which are complete and a number of which involve multiple unique studies.
- Collectively, initiatives under the Project's contribution program have hosted dozens of workshops and research symposiums, created ten websites for public knowledge dissemination, and submitted more than 50 research reports.
- PS has directly contracted nine research studies, funded 24 student projects, and hosted a range of events to bring together officials, researchers and stakeholders, including family members of victims of the Air India bombing.
- Kanishka has generated new capacity to support counter-terrorism practitioners through new relationships between departments and researchers. Of note, the **Canadian Network for Research on Terrorism, Security and Society (TSAS)** was created in 2012 with core funding from Round One of the Kanishka Project. TSAS fosters multidisciplinary research on terrorist radicalization, the coordinated interaction of academic researchers with government officials, and the cultivation of a new generation of young scholars interested in terrorism, security, and the impact of both on society. It currently has over 50 affiliated researchers from a variety of disciplines with partnerships across government, civil society groups, and internationally.
- The development of a "community of science and practice" has resulted in more informed public discourse, which played out in a real way after the October 22 Ottawa shootings.
  - Scholars from TSAS and other Kanishka studies participated in over 100 media appearances in the days following the Ottawa shooting.
  - Kanishka researchers quickly responded to a call from the federal S&I Community for assessments on the reaction of online communities to the Oct 22 Ottawa shooting.

### **RESEARCH FUNDED**

- Consultations with partners in the security and intelligence community have shown that their engagement with Kanishka researchers, especially through the TSAS network, have directly contributed to priority setting for intelligence analysts, as well as to the framing of analytical products, and to the content of intelligence assessments.
- Ongoing research projects like *The Syria Conflict: the Evolution of al Qaeda and other Militant Movements after the Arab Spring*, by the **International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR)**, which is housed at **King's College London (UK)**, are not only contributing to public understanding about the involvement of foreign terrorist fighters, but also serving a complementary function to closed-source intelligence. Findings from work under the above-mentioned *Syria Conflict* study have recently been used to brief frontline police officers on the phenomenon of young females traveling to Syria, how

they are being recruited, and therefore what signs to consider in assessing risk and supporting appropriate early intervention.

- Other Kanishka-funded studies by the **SecDev Foundation** and by **Professor Lorenzo Vidino** are showing how in a number of cases of radicalization leading to violence, patterns of online activity shift from asking questions and seeking knowledge to increasingly closed-minded rhetoric. As a result of their study, the SecDev Group has shifted from looking primarily at supporting government analysis of social media for preventing radicalization to how they can better support civil society organizations, and will soon be launching a web portal for this purpose.
- Several studies, including work led by **Ryerson University** and the **University of Alberta**, are showing that there are significant and powerful counter-messages already being created within communities to challenge recruitment efforts by movements like ISIS.
- The work of the Kanishka Project is directly contributing to the three elements of how the Government is working to counter violent extremism identified in the **2014 Public Report on the Terrorist Threat to Canada**. The three elements, and examples of Kanishka projects that support progress in these areas, are as follows:

#### **Communities: Building Prevention Capacity**

- Researchers from **McGill University** have expanded their Kanishka study to learn from participants in PS-run community dialogues on real-life radicalization-to-violence experiences and thereby better understand and address sources of intolerance and potential violence. This study is called *The Impact of Narratives of Conflict, Security and Co-Existence on Muslim Communities in Canada* and partners include the community group **North American Spiritual Revival** as well as **York University**.
- **Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD)** is creating short films about Canadian experiences with violent extremism along with training materials, to be used as resources for the prevention of terrorism and violent extremism by youth and community organizations, in school settings, by police for community outreach, and by any other partners working to prevent violent extremism ("Extreme Dialogue").

#### **Countering Violent Extremism: Policing and Communities**

- **Ryerson University** and the **University of Alberta** are working with communities and police in Toronto and Edmonton to study factors that heighten or reduce the risk of violent extremism, how these differ across communities, and how police services can strengthen partnerships tailored to local needs.
- Researchers from the **Jewish General Hospital**, along with **Ryerson University**, the **University of Quebec in Montreal**, the **University of Saskatchewan**, and the **Environics Institute**, are examining how police cultural competency training

programs contribute to national security law enforcement in Montreal, Toronto and Saskatoon.

**Stopping Radicalization to Violence: Targeted Intervention**

- Ongoing research about extremist travelers to Syria and Iraq by ICSR is providing some of the most commonly-cited public information about the scale and extent of the phenomenon, the aims and motivations of those who join violent extremist groups in those countries, their travel patterns, as well as who is influencing individuals who choose to travel through both online and offline means.

Kanishka Project – WG Meetings/Deliverables of the ICSR Study

<b>Working Group</b>	<b>Frequency of meeting</b>	<b># of times has met over the past five years</b>	<b>Are there records of decisions (can we have access to these, if required)</b>
<b>Steering Committee</b>	Once per round of funding	5, plus 3+ times virtually	Yes (access could be arranged)
<b>Working Group</b>	Once per round of funding	5 meetings+1 telcon, plus 3+ times virtually	Yes (access could be arranged)
<b>Advisory Group</b>	<i>Ad hoc</i>	3	No

## Allen, Juliet (PS/SP)

---

**From:** Kubicek, Brett (PS/SP)  
**Sent:** Friday, January 15, 2016 10:25 AM  
**To:** Giroux2, Denis (PS/SP)  
**Cc:** Martin, Connie (PS/SP)  
**Subject:** RE: Kanishka Evaluation - Request for documents  
**Attachments:** report canada internet.docx

Ok, here goes with a first wave of answers. More later, I hope...

I think only 23 of the contribution agreements are complete (no big deal though).

We have at least 9 examples of direct contracts, with 5 being complete. (I think there are more than 9, but need to review.)

The Steering Committee was asked at least a few times to make decisions virtually, especially where there had to be proposal amendments, as well as decisions like whether to support any of the small number proposals that came through SSHRC funding mechanisms. This probably happened in 2 or 3 of the 5 calls for proposals, and on more than one issue. So I'd say 3+ virtual decisions. We can track those down if needed.

Same for Working Group on virtual decisions, especially to consult on proposal amendments and decisions on SSHRC proposals, and there were probably more such virtual meetings. A guess would be 5+, but could be more. The Working Group was also the community we drew from for review boards on e.g. targeted contract calls for proposals and the Research Affiliate Program competitions, where boards needed to be much smaller. So there would have been in the range of 10 of these sub meetings (at least a couple of the 5 contract calls required multiple meetings, and there were at least 3 meetings to decide on the Research Affiliate Program competitions). As well, the working group had several virtual and in-person meetings for priority setting. So we leaned on them to create the four Kanishka Theme areas at the start of the program, and then we held an all-day retreat (mentioned below), followed by further virtual consultations in the summer of 2013 to review progress and the broader research and threat environment to focus efforts, including a targeted list of questions used both to inform the following open calls, and to motivate several targeted contract calls.

For item I (Syria Conflict), there are several deliverables. We have a draft of the final report too, attached ('report canada internet'). Should be published late this month or sometime next month. As part of this study they have also published:

- <http://icsr.info/2014/04/icsr-insight-inspires-syrian-foreign-fighters/>
- <http://icsr.info/2015/10/icsr-report-victims-perpetrators-assets-narratives-islamic-state-defectors/>
- And this study was produced based on the data from our funded study, and is considered a deliverable:  
<http://icsr.info/2015/06/icsr-report-till-martyrdom-us-part-gender-isis-phenomenon/>
- This web resource (which you can add to the web site count): <https://icsrforeignfighters.wordpress.com/>

For item H, we'll be addressing that when we conduct our own performance measures, focusing on 'fit for use' measures linked to our logic model. Though some basic evidence is not only the much larger network of researchers engaged with Kanishka and working directly with gov partners (e.g. the #s from TSAS), but how we have a much wider range of gov and non-gov partners at all levels of government, domestically (e.g. more than 6 municipal police forces were involved in our Canada-US-UK event in July), and internationally such as through the Policy Planners Network (where Kanishka has been strongly represented - <http://www.strategicdialogue.org/programmes/counter-extremism/ppn>), and the new 5 Eyes research partnership on CVE.

As well, while I think they have this, here is some language re the community of science/practice:

The Kanishka Project aims to increase the knowledge base about terrorism and counter-terrorism, but goes beyond simply studying terrorism, as many of the studies are developing and testing new approaches to support more effective policies, tools and resources for law enforcement and people on the front lines.

The initiative has aimed to rapidly and significantly expand research capacity outside government, ensure that focus is on relevant questions, and make the results available for those who need them, in the right form and at the right time. This capacity-building emphasis was designed to generate important new knowledge in the short term, and create a sufficiently strong core and momentum for ongoing, long-term improvement.

Prior to the Kanishka Project, a fundamental problem was that there were few scholars focusing on relevant questions, those involved were largely isolated from one another, and the research was of limited interest to practitioners. There was no community of science for researchers focusing on counter-terrorism relevant to the Canadian context. To improve the knowledge base in support of more effective counter-terrorism, however, a community of practice is also important, reflecting the parallel idea that there needs to be a critical mass of perspectives from policy, program and civil society circles to share lessons and challenge assumptions.

For J, tricky, but I'll try to send Julie and Bahman a couple recent examples over Dragon. I'll let you know when I've done so.

For some other events, again, there will be more, but here's another wave:

- Metropolis Toronto pre-conference: 'Fear and Polarization: What can we learn from Europe?', a plenary on resilience, multiple workshops, and a keynote by the Minister of Public Safety – Feb. 2012
- UBC workshop on migration and security, and research network development workshop – April 2012
- Montreal/Quebec Metropolis Centre 'justice, policing and security' capstone event – November 2012
- Ottawa series of events on risk and resilience at Metropolis conference including plenary 'Understanding risk and fostering resilience in a diverse society', as well as workshops – March 2013
- Information session for families of Air India victims on Kanishka and the ex gratia payment program – January 2012
- DM-level policy conversation, and working level roundtable with scholars and officials on countering violent extremism (co-host with NS Policy) – January 2012
- Ottawa Kanishka collaborative research design symposium for researchers and officials – May 2012
- Multiple engagement sessions with individual researchers to discuss their Kanishka research – including for multiple meetings of the Cross Cultural Roundtable on Security – or research related to Kanishka to gauge if of relevance to Canadian policy and program needs on counter-terrorism (estimate well over 20)
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- Ottawa – breakfast session for Minister of Public Safety with Kanishka graduate student Research Affiliate Program award winners, along with select Kanishka-funded scholars – April 2013
- Kanishka retreat of officials and key subject matter experts to conduct a mid-term progress review of Kanishka, as well as the state of terrorism research and the threat picture more generally, to help focus priorities and operation of the program – June 2013
- Interdepartmental workshop to examine connections between research on hate speech and preventing/responding to violent extremism – June 2013

**Brett Kubicek, PhD**

Manager, Research and Academic Relations | Gestionnaire, Recherche et relations académiques  
Portfolio Affairs and Communications Branch | Secteur des affaires du portefeuille et des communications

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Tel: 613.991.7779 | Fax: 613.954.3131 | [brett.kubicek@canada.ca](mailto:brett.kubicek@canada.ca)

**From:** Giroux2, Denis (PS/SP)  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 14, 2016 3:30 PM  
**To:** Kubicek, Brett (PS/SP)  
**Cc:** Martin, Connie (PS/SP)  
**Subject:** FW: Kanishka Evaluation - Request for documents

Brett,

Here's the key highlights doc. It responds to the bulk of the items requested by Audit. There are two elements in it that highlighted in yellow; I believe them to be accurate, but I'd appreciate if you could confirm them. The rest I've been able to either confirm independently or by consulting Cassandra.

I could really use your help/insight for Items I and J. I assume that the ICSR study that is mentioned (*The Syria Conflict: the Evolution of al Qaeda and other Militant Movements after the Arab Spring*) should be ready soon; would that be the research that is alluded to in your recent exchanges with King's College?

More importantly, you probably would be much better placed than I am to know about any reports that may not have been released publicly, and about any decision/advisory documents that I'm not yet familiar with.

For the AG/WG/SC, I've inserted the meetings+RoDs that I've found on RDIMS, but I've got the feeling that there's a bit that I haven't found re: the Advisory Group. The info that's there comes from my chat with Cassandra, and I'm not able to corroborate or confirm the info for that one. Yasmeen and Connie helped me out, and we've found evidence of a total of three meetings. Would there be others you'd be aware of? Would we have had RoDs for these?

Working Group	Frequency of meeting	# of times has met over the past five years	Are there records of decisions (can we have access to these, if required)
Steering Committee	Once per round of funding	5	Yes (access could be arranged)
Working Group	Once per round of funding	5 meetings+1 telcon	Yes (access could be arranged)
Advisory Group	Ad hoc	3	No

(We could optionally offer to share ToRs of these groups with Audit.)

Here are the dates of the meetings I'm aware of:

Steering Committee: 7 Feb 2012, 5 June 2012, 21 January 2013, 23 May 2013, January 2014.

Working Group: February 2012, 31 May 2012, 6 May 2013, 10 January 2013, December 2013.

Advisory Group: 9 Jan 2014, 24 Jan 2014 (Telcon), 5 Nov 2014.

Yasmeen also put together a list of workshops/research symposiums that we've hosted throughout the Project lifecycle. She advised me that some may be missing, but this is a start.

#### **Workshops/Conferences/Events hosted by Kanishka Project 2012-Present**

1. Kanishka London Symposium – December 14-15, 2015 (London, UK)
2. Workshop on Behaviour patterns of lone actor terrorists, solo actors, and mass casualty shooters (Gill/Corner/Amarasingam) – December 2015
3. Open Source Intelligence Workshop – November 2015
4. Radicalization and Violent Extremism: Lessons Learned from Canada, the UK and the US - July 2015 (Washington, DC)



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8. Children & Youth in Challenging Contexts (CYCC) Network and Wisdom2Action Calgary -  
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9. Metropolis Pre-forum: Kanishka Project Symposium (17<sup>th</sup> National Metropolis Conference) – March 2015
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14. Kanishka Project Sessions at the 16<sup>th</sup> National Metropolis Conference – March 2014 (RDIMS#1057916)
15. Air India Families’ Event – Feb 2014
16. Kanishka Opening Conference – November 2012

(The e-mail below still has a line in red which would be what I suggest to send them as a response to Item H re: the  
community of science and practice.)

**Denis**

Denis.Giroux2@canada.ca  
613-949-5728

---

**From:** McLaughlin, Julie (PS/SP)  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 05, 2016 10:52 AM  
**To:** Kubicek, Brett (PS/SP); Lively, Cassandra (PS/SP)  
**Cc:** Assadi2, Bahman (PS/SP)  
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Good morning,

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Would it be possible to provide us with the following information and documentation:

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provided – doc #1308963), in particular:
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  - e. # of research studies contracted directly by PS, including # of studies that are completed;
  - f. # of student projects funded;
  - g. # and nature of other events hosted;
  - h. Some background and more concrete performance information on the Community of Science and  
Practice, if available;

The “community of science and practice” mentioned in the key highlights document is not a formal  
organization, but more the informal academic/research network that was created through Kanishka.

- i. *A copy of the ICSR study entitled "The Syria Conflict: the Evolution of al Qaeda and other Militant Movements after the Arab Spring"; and perhaps, all reports that are not publicly available;*
- j. *Any other documents that potentially discusses the need for having an Initiative such as Kanishka, including any new MCs or other inception documents.*

2) We would also like to get the following information on various management committees:

We would appreciate if you could provide this information by **January 15**.

Please let us know if you have any questions.

Thank you

**Julie McLaughlin**

Evaluator | Évaluatrice

Internal Audit and Evaluation Directorate | Direction générale de la vérification interne et de l'évaluation

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[Julie.mclaughlin@canada.ca](mailto:Julie.mclaughlin@canada.ca)

**Pages 115 to / à 146  
are duplicates of  
sont des duplicatas des  
pages 6 to / à 37**

## Allen, Juliet (PS/SP)

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**From:** Giroux2, Denis (PS/SP)  
**Sent:** Friday, January 15, 2016 3:31 PM  
**To:** McLaughlin, Julie (PS/SP)  
**Cc:** Assadi2, Bahman (PS/SP); Kubicek, Brett (PS/SP); Martin, Connie (PS/SP)  
**Subject:** RE: Kanishka Evaluation - Request for documents  
**Attachments:** ICSR Draft Final Report.docx; PS-SP-#1730990-1-KPCP - List of Events.DOCX; PS-SP-#1308963-4A-KPCP - Project Highlights.DOCX; PS-SP-#1731017-v1-KPCP\_Working\_Groups\_-\_Table\_of\_Meetings.DOCX

Hi Julie,

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More info to follow, some of which you'll receive over Dragon.

Best,

**Denis**

[Denis.Giroux2@canada.ca](mailto:Denis.Giroux2@canada.ca)

613-949-5728

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**From:** McLaughlin, Julie (PS/SP)  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 05, 2016 10:52 AM  
**To:** Kubicek, Brett (PS/SP); Lively, Cassandra (PS/SP)  
**Cc:** Assadi2, Bahman (PS/SP)  
**Subject:** Kanishka Evaluation - Request for documents

Good morning,

I hope you had good Holidays.

Would it be possible to provide us with the following information and documentation:

- 1) An update on the Kanishka Project – Key achievements to date (an update on the Project Highlights that you provided –doc #1308963), in particular:
  - a. Total amount of investment to date;
  - b. # of total projects and # of projects completed;
  - c. # of workshops and research symposiums etc. hosted;
  - d. # of websites etc. developed;
  - e. # of research studies contracted directly by PS, including # of studies that are completed;
  - f. # of student projects funded;
  - g. # and nature of other events hosted;
  - h. Some background and more concrete performance information on the Community of Science and Practice, if available;
  - i. A copy of the ICSR study entitled “The Syria Conflict: the Evolution of al Qaeda and other Militant Movements after the Arab Spring”; and perhaps, all reports that are not publicly available;
  - j. Any other documents that potentially discusses the need for having an Initiative such as Kanishka, including any new MCs or other inception documents.

- 2) We would also like to get the following information on various management committees:

Working Group	Frequency of meeting	# of times has met over the past five years	Are there records of decisions (can we have access to these, if required)
Steering Committee			
Working Group			
Advisory Group			

We would appreciate if you could provide this information by **January 15**.

Please let us know if you have any questions.

Thank you

**Julie McLaughlin**

Evaluator | Évaluatrice

Internal Audit and Evaluation Directorate | Direction générale de la vérification interne et de l'évaluation

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**Pages 150 to / à 181  
are duplicates of  
sont des duplicatas des  
pages 6 to / à 37**

**Pages 182 to / à 187  
are duplicates of  
sont des duplicatas des  
pages 104 to / à 109**



**Allen, Juliet (PS/SP)**

s.19(1)

**From:** Peter Neumann  
**Sent:** Friday, November 27, 2015 12:58 PM  
**To:** Kubicek, Brett (PS/SP); Kubicek, Brett (PS/SP)  
**Subject:** Fwd:  
**Attachments:** report canada internet.docx

Dear Brett,

I hope this message finds you well.

I realise this has been about a week overdue, but Paris - once again - made life very hectic over here.

Attached is a first draft of our online report. It's way longer than expected and still requires some editing and addition of Appendices, but it should give you a good sense that the product is in hand. It goes against much of the conventional wisdom about online radicalisation, and should create a fair amount of healthy debate. We anticipate publication in January.

Our online portal on foreign fighters has now been launched. There are currently about 500 items that can be looked at and searched, with 500 more to follow. The link is here:

<https://icsrforeignfighters.wordpress.com/>

I hope this provides you with the content needed to get the final sign off for the rest of our grant. If there's any problem, please just let me know.

Once again, many thanks for all your support over the years. I hope we can remain involved, as we are certain to continue working on this.

Best wishes,  
Peter

## **Peers over Propaganda: Online Radicalisation among British Foreign Fighters**

*By Nick Kaderbhai, Shiraz Maher, and Peter Neumann*

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### **Introduction**

The impact of online communication on processes of radicalisation has been vigorously debated for years. Extremist groups were among the first and most enthusiastic adopters of the internet – a medium which they believed was free of government control and censorship, allowing for their unfiltered message to be heard by supporters and sympathisers all over the world.<sup>1</sup> Nowadays, there is practically no extremist group that doesn't have an online presence – though their activities vary in degree and sophistication.<sup>2</sup>

Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict in 2011, jihadist groups are widely thought to have broken new ground. Their use of social media is believed to be massive and sophisticated. For 'Islamic State', it has come to be seen as a central and distinctive feature of its modus operandi, helping the group intimidate and manipulate their enemies, as well as radicalize and recruit potential supporters.<sup>3</sup> It is the latter – the role of online communications in radicalization and recruitment - that is the subject of this report. What impact does social media have on wannabe foreign fighters from Western countries? How do they use the internet, and – most importantly – what makes them join up?

In much of the recent media coverage, the Islamic State's online campaign is presented as strongly coordinated and centrally organized, reaching a global audience through high end video

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Neumann, *Countering Online Radicalization in America* (Washington DC: Bipartisan Policy Center, 2012), pp. 15-17; available at <http://bipartisanpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/default/files/BPC%20Online%20Radicalization%20Report.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> See Gabriel Weimann, *New Terrorism and New Media* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, 2014); available at [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/STIP\\_140501\\_new\\_terrorism\\_F.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/STIP_140501_new_terrorism_F.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Rose Powell, 'Cats and Kalashnikovs: Behind the ISIL social media strategy', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 June 2014; Steve Rose, 'The Isis propaganda war: a hi—tech media jihad', *Guardian*, 7 October 2014; Scott Shane and Ben Hubbard, 'ISIS Displaying a Deft Command of Varied Media', *New York Times*, 30 August 2014.

productions and sophisticated Twitter campaigns.<sup>4</sup> The impression created is that of a group of skillful manipulators brainwashing their helpless subjects into becoming supporters of Islamic State and, ultimately, making their way to Syria. Yet much of the research that members of our team have conducted points in different directions:

- An earlier ICSR report uncovered the role of 'disseminators' and 'cheerleaders' – online activists who are often Western based and have no formal ties to Islamic State;<sup>5</sup>
- Twitter campaigns generate less interest than is commonly believed,<sup>6</sup>
- Online propaganda alone rarely creates the kind of commitment that turns sympathisers into actual recruits.<sup>7</sup>

In short, none of our earlier findings support the notion of top-down recruitment that so often dominates the news coverage.

### Approach

In trying to resolve the contradiction between conventional wisdom and our own, earlier empirical findings, we took a radically different approach from existing reports on the Islamic State and social media. Unlike everyone else, the principal focus of our investigation was not the Islamic State's online campaign – which we believe has been given an excessive amounts of coverage – but the recruits themselves.

In other words, we were not so much interested in what Islamic State *put out*, but – rather – what the wannabe fighters *took in*. We wanted to understand how they use the internet, and what parts of the internet, if any, caused them to join up. In doing so, what we sought to avoid was the kind of circular logic whereby researchers focus on the Islamic State's social media campaign, ignore everything else, and – then – conclude that it must have been the social media campaign that prompted people to join.

The reason we were able to do this is the groundbreaking primary research that ICSR has conducted on Syrian foreign fighters. Starting in 2012, we have now collected nearly 700 online

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Aya Batrawy, 'ISIS Outpaces Arab Governments in Social Media War', *Associated Press*, 21 September 2014; Patrick Kingsley, 'Who is behind ISIS's terrifying online propaganda operation?', *Guardian*, 23 June 2014; Shiv Malik and Sandra Laville, 'Isis in duel with Twitter and YouTube to spread extremist propaganda', *Guardian*, 24 September 2014; Charlotte Meredith, 'ISIS YouTube Video', *Huffington Post*, 26 June 2014; Shane and Hubbard, 'ISIS Displaying', op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Carter, Shiraz Maher, and Peter R. Neumann, *#Greenbirds: Measuring Importance and Influence in Syrian Foreign Fighter Networks* (London: ICSR, 2014); available at <http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/ICSR-Report-Greenbirds-Measuring-Importance-and-Influence-in-Syrian-Foreign-Fighter-Networks.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Shiraz Maher and Joseph Carter, 'Analyzing the ISIS Twitter Storm', *War on the Rocks*, 24 June 2014; available at <http://warontherocks.com/2014/06/analyzing-the-isis-twitter-storm/>.

<sup>7</sup> Ali Fisher and Nico Prucha, 'ISIS Is Winning the Online Jihad Against the West', *Daily Beast*, 1 October 2014; available at <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/10/01/isis-is-winning-the-online-jihad-against-the-west.html>.

social media profiles of Western citizens or residents who have gone to Syria and Iraq to join Sunni militant groups, mainly Jabhat al Nusra and, especially, the Islamic State. In addition, we have communicated with nearly 100 active fighters – in some cases repeatedly and over the course of several months – and carried out fieldwork in the Turkish region from where most of them enter Syria.

The use of Palantir, a powerful analytics platform, enabled us to make sense of this data and generate a small sample of 10 male British fighters for whom we possess sufficient online data for the period before their departure in order to understand their personal trajectories of radicalisation and recruitment. It is those fighters whose Tweets, comments, and Facebook comments will feature prominently in the main part of this report.

## Findings

What we found was new in some respects – and not so new in others:

- *THE PAINS OF INACTION*: One of the novelties is the impact of **massive amounts of conflict-related, often highly emotional, content** that wannabe fighters are now exposed to. As extremists have populated mainstream platforms, especially Twitter, it is no longer possible – or necessary – to separate between ‘moderate’, radical and extremist sources. For many of the Western fighters, the sustained (and cumulative) effect seems to have been an overwhelming feeling of guilt – an emotional pain based on the stark contrast between one’s own comfort and the enormous suffering and injustices experienced by one’s ‘brothers and sisters’ in Syria.
- *FIGHTING COMMUNITIES*: Another new phenomenon is the **direct virtual contact between wannabes and active fighters** on the frontlines. In contrast to previous conflicts, supporters are no longer limited to watching videos and reading statements but can interact with fighters in real time through platforms like Facebook, Ask.fm, Twitter, and private messaging applications. This means that fighters and wannabes can form virtual social communities, build trust and commitment, and – especially where wannabes and active fighters knew each other previously – create a powerful sense of moral and personal obligation to join the fight.
- *ON AND OFFLINE*: What’s not new is the **interplay between on- and offline interactions** which has occurred in a majority of the cases we have examined. The internet may help to facilitate contacts and provide inspiration, but people’s *actual* decision to go and their subsequent transfer into Syria tends to be preceded by a significant amount of face to face interaction. This is important for the wannabe fighters who require strong, personal bonds to become involved in ‘high risk activism’, but it is equally important for the militant groups who want applicants to provide ‘references’, also known as *tazkya*.

## Structure

Our findings go against conventional wisdom. Based on our research, it was peers – not propaganda – that convinced the British fighters in our sample to go to Syria. The social media campaigns of militant groups like Islamic State may have been important but not decisive.

This does not mean that the internet didn't matter. Open-source, widely accessible content contributed to people's sense of guilt and helplessness. Virtual contacts with active fighters made them have a stake and, in many cases, created a strong sense of social obligation. Ultimately, however, it wasn't the online environment as such – but the extent to which it created peer to peer contacts – that facilitated the decision to go.

The report begins with a chapter contrasting the Islamic State's social media campaign with the ways in which British foreign fighters have *actually* used online communications. This is followed by three small chapters describing the key dynamics and processes that we believe are significant: the first deals with the 'pains of action' caused by the prolonged exposure to, and involvement with, conflict related content; the second looks at 'fighting communities' involving wannabe and actual fighters; and, finally, we examine the back and forth between on- and offline communications that tends to precede, and facilitate, the decision to go to Syria.

We are confident that our report makes an important contribution to the fast evolving field of research on online radicalisation. It builds on, and develops, long-established notions like Doug McAdam's 'high risk activism'<sup>8</sup> and Marc Sageman's 'sense of moral outrage',<sup>9</sup> while rejecting the increasingly popular idea that it is the internet – and the internet alone – that radicalizes people. To paraphrase Mark Juergensmeyer, the internet is not *the* problem, but aspects of it may well be problematic.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Doug McAdam, 'Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer', *American Journal of Sociology*, 92(1) (1986), pp. 64-90.

<sup>9</sup> Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. 73-6.

<sup>10</sup> See Mark Juergensmeyer, 'Religion as a Cause of Terrorism' in Louise Richardson (ed.), *The Roots of Terrorism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 133-144.

## Islamic State vs. Wannabe Fighters

The social media campaigns of jihadist groups in the Syrian/Iraqi conflict are extensive – but are they also effective? Many experts and commentators believe that – based on size and sophistication alone – they *must* be good at recruiting people. They describe in glowing terms Islamic State's 'really effective brand strategy',<sup>11</sup> its 'planning and professionalism',<sup>12</sup> the 'cinematic quality' of its videos,<sup>13</sup> and how the group 'is using every contemporary mode of messaging to recruit fighters'.<sup>14</sup> The assumption is that online exposure – and online exposure alone – makes people join.

The only problem: there is no evidence to support this claim; no information on how wannabe fighters are *actually* using the internet; and no discussion of what other influences may have caused them to go to Syria.

This chapter offers two perspectives on jihadist internet use in the Syrian/Iraqi conflict. One is top-down: the Islamic State's online campaign which – we are constantly told – is successful at recruiting foreign fighters. The other is bottom up: the use of the internet by fighters and wannabe fighters themselves. What emerges is a stark contrast: while the Islamic State's social media campaign is indeed massive and sophisticated, it is not as top down and centrally coordinated as often alleged, nor does most of it impact on wannabe foreign fighters during the process of joining up.

### How the Islamic State Uses the Internet

The purpose of the Islamic State's social media campaign is to *intimidate* and to *inspire*.<sup>15</sup> Regarding intimidation, the Islamic State has proven to be powerful and innovative, be it by communicating threats, demoralizing Western audiences, or by 'sowing terror, disunion, and defection' among its enemies. There is evidence, for example, that the group's military offensive in the summer of 2014 was coordinated with its social media efforts, forcing populations to flee their villages and compelling Iraqi soldiers to abandon their positions out of fear they might be caught, tortured and executed.<sup>16</sup>

Less clear is the extent to which the Islamic State's social media campaign has succeeded at making people join. This is not for lack of trying. The Islamic State produces more 'inspirational' output than other jihadist groups and has been the only one to consistently target

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<sup>11</sup> Sam Thielman, 'ISIS' Sinister Media Strategy', *AdWeek*, 10 September 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Kingsley, 'Who Is Behind', *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> Spencer Ackerman, 'ISIS Online Propaganda Outpacing U.S. Counter-efforts, Ex-Officials Warn', *Guardian*, 22 September 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Shane and Hubbard, 'ISIS Displaying', *op. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> Alessandro Bonzio, 'ISIS' use of social media isn't surprising: its digital strategy is', *Huffington Post*, 15 September 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Emerson Brooking, 'The ISIS Propaganda Machine Is Horrifying and Effective: How Does It Work?', *Defense in Depth, Council on Foreign Relations*, 31 December 2014; available at <http://blogs.cfr.org/davidson/2014/12/31/best-of-2014-the-isis-propaganda-machine-is-horrifying-and-effective-how-does-it-work/>. Also George Packer, 'A Friend Flees the Horror of ISIS', *The New Yorker*, 6 August 2014.

Western audiences in their own, European languages. All of this output is professionally made and well presented, demonstrating members' skill at using the latest equipment, editing and graphic software.<sup>17</sup> Al Hayat Media Centre, one of the group's media production entities, has released a whole range of media products, including feature length documentaries like *Flames of War*; shorter videos highlighting the foreigners' 'good works'; interviews with Western fighters; translations of Arabic language content; and – not least – the group's online magazine Dabiq which has been published in half a dozen languages.<sup>18</sup>

Another striking facet is the group's dissemination strategy. The Islamic State maintains multiple accounts on practically every major social media platform, including Facebook, Instagram, and Ask.fm. On Twitter, it is represented by various parts of the leadership, provincial commands, and hundreds of individual fighters who maintain their own, personal accounts.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the group has repeatedly 'hijacked' popular hashtags (for example, '#WorldCup') and created automatized fake accounts to promote its own (for instance, '#AllEyesonISIS'). For a brief period, it even had its own Android app – *Dawn of Glad Tidings* – through which it sent messages via subscribers' Twitter accounts.<sup>20</sup> The cumulative effect is both practical and psychological. It enables the Islamic State to swamp the internet, making takedowns more difficult and less effective, while at the same time 'magnifying' the group's message and creating the perception of momentum and strength.<sup>21</sup>

What's more, the group is conscious that it has multiple audiences who need to be reached and spoken to differently. Pictures of executions or military victories are used to increase the group's visibility and create a sense of shock and terror among non-jihadist audiences, while sympathizers are additionally exposed to 'softer' messages articulating the idea of an Islamic utopia. Potential recruits, therefore, will see the group's excessively violent side but also pictures of foreign fighters distributing food, adjudicating disputes, manning local police forces, or – indeed – holding kittens and showing off pots of Nutella.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, content and messages are segmented according to language, often incorporating local references and featuring 'role models' from the respective countries and/or language groups at which they are targeted.<sup>23</sup> This system of customization, along with its capabilities in production and dissemination, are indicative of the group's sophistication – resulting in a campaign that, in the words of J.M. Berger, 'would put American social media marketing gurus to shame'.<sup>24</sup>

### *Cheerleaders, Disseminators, and Fanboys*

<sup>17</sup> Kingsley 'Who is behind', op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> See Olivia Becker, 'ISIS has a really slick and sophisticated media department', *Vice News*, 12 July 2014; 'New ISIS Media Company Addresses English, German, and French Speaking Westerners', *MEMRI*, 23 June 2014.

<sup>19</sup> For a sample of Islamic State related Twitter accounts and activity, see Erin M. Saltman and Charlie Winter, *Islamic State: The Changing Face of Modern Jihadism* (London: Quilliam, 2014), pp. 66-70.

<sup>20</sup> JM Berger, 'How ISIS Games Twitter', *The Atlantic*, 16 June 2014. See also Alessandro Bonzio, 'ISIS' use of social media isn't surprising: its digital strategy is', *Huffington Post*, 15 September 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Berger, 'How ISIS Games', op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Berger, 'How ISIS Games', op. cit.

This is not to say, however, that the group's entire online presence is top down and centrally coordinated. In our #Greenbirds report, we showed that the most influential spiritual authorities among Western foreign fighters had no formal association with Islamic State or other jihadist groups, nor were they located in Syria or Iraq (one was based in the United States, the other was Australian). They served as spiritual 'cheerleaders' who had taken it upon themselves to promote and justify the idea of foreign fighting, typically through the internet, and emerged as important – albeit wholly independent – sources of influence.<sup>25</sup>

Our report also highlighted the role of so-called 'disseminators' who are key to pushing the groups' messages to their Western recipients. Among the Western foreign fighters in our database, the most popular Twitter accounts were not the groups' official accounts (none of them even made it into the Top 10), but those of independent disseminators like 'Shami Witness' who were broadly supportive of the Islamic State, justified its actions and re-tweeted its material, but also produced their own output (for example, memes), promoted unorthodox sources of information, and – occasionally – disagreed with the party line.<sup>26</sup> Seven years ago, Jarret Brachman coined the term 'jihobbyist' to describe such individuals, recognizing that, in a vast, growing and seemingly anarchical structure like the internet, they were essential to '[moving] forward the Jihadist agenda'.<sup>27</sup>

Not least, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of so-called 'fanboys' – enthusiastic supporters of the Islamic State who populate Facebook and Twitter and spend considerable amounts of time discussing the latest developments and re-tweeting the pictures, memes and other material published by fighters and disseminators. Communicating with other, seemingly more prominent members gives them a sense of being part of the movement and having a role to play – even if their direct involvement with jihadist groups is minimal. Like the cheerleaders and disseminators, they are supporters, not members, and they receive no explicit direction. Yet their contribution is essential to making the group visible and effective. Acting like a swarm, they are what ICSR research fellow Nico Prucha called the 'media mujahideen'.<sup>28</sup>

### How Wannabe Fighters Use the Internet

For our analysis of how wannabe fighters use the internet, we examined the online postings of the 10 British fighters in our sample between the first time they had publicly contemplated the idea of going to Syria and their eventual departure. We didn't, therefore, look at their entire radicalisation trajectory (many had, in fact, been involved in extremist causes long before the Syrian conflict) but narrowly focused on *the process of joining up*,<sup>29</sup> which could last from a few weeks to several months. Our data consisted of Tweets and Facebook posts – in some cases also

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<sup>25</sup> Carter, #Greenbirds, op cit., pp. 18-28.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 15-18.

<sup>27</sup> Jarret Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 19.

<sup>28</sup> Ali Fisher and Nico Prucha, 'ISIS is winning the online jihad against the West', *Daily Beast*, 1 October 2014.

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of concepts like 'recruitment' and 'joining up' in the context of jihadist radicalisation, see Peter R. Neumann, 'Joining Al-Qaeda: Jihadist Recruitment in Europe', *Adelphi Paper #399, International Institute for Strategic Studies*, January 2009.



blog and Ask.fm entries – which we studied with a view to understanding their use of online platforms, behaviors, interactions, and changes in attitude.

For this section, we aimed to create a first – and, arguably, very broad – impression of how the wannabe fighters in our sample have used the internet. To understand change and innovation, we compared our empirical findings to earlier research about jihadist online behavior. Crucially, we then looked for evidence of potential crossovers between fighters' use of the internet and the online campaigns of jihadist groups like the Islamic State. The result is a first sketch of wannabe foreign fighters' online ecosystem which – in our view – consists of three pillars: use of open platforms; personal outreach; and 'fanboy socialization'.

### *Open Platforms*

Our first observation is wannabe fighters' widespread use of open, mainstream platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and – more recently - Telegram. All the wannabe fighters in our sample had such accounts which they used extensively to discuss political and religious issues, as well as their attitudes towards the conflict, Western society, and the idea of making *hijra* (that is, going to Syria).<sup>30</sup> The openness of these platforms didn't deter them. At the time of observation, even sensitive discussions were frequently conducted via unlocked Twitter accounts, and Facebook pages remained relatively open (though this may have changed in recent months). In this respect, the British wannabes in our sample were typical of many Western fighters who maintain accounts on at least one of the platforms.

The use of open platforms stands in marked contrast to earlier periods when the majority of jihadist sympathizers populated stand-alone websites, so-called 'forums'. The forums were often password-protected, and people had to be introduced by existing members or spend considerable periods gaining 'credibility' in order to gain access to closed discussions.<sup>31</sup> The move to open platforms has lowered the threshold to becoming involved in the jihadist milieu. Wannabes no longer need to seek out forums and subject themselves to a complex process of admission. They are able to 'dabble' in jihadist discussions without having to fully commit to the cause, or confront potentially troubling questions about legality which signing up to a closed forum might raise.

Another consequence is that wannabe fighters are exposed to a wider range of material, allowing for greater eclecticism and, by definition, reducing the relative impact of any one particular source. Among the memes, pictures, articles, and videos that wannabe jihadists posted on their accounts was output from mainstream television channels, non-jihadist religious sources, NGO's, and think tanks. What's more, the explicitly jihadist content originated with fighters,

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<sup>30</sup> The concept of *hijra* relates to the Prophet Mohammed's journey from Mecca to Medina, and is frequently invoked by jihadists to justify (and mandate) the migration to a foreign land where Muslims face injustice or oppression. See xxx

<sup>31</sup> For an overview of the jihadist discussion forum 'scene', see Mohammed Ali Musawi, *Cheering for Osama: How Jihadists Use Internet Discussion Forums* (London: Quilliam, 2010), esp. Chapter 1; available at <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/cheering-for-osama-how-jihadists-use-the-internet-forums.pdf>.

disseminators, religious 'cheerleaders', and other fanboys – not only jihadist groups and their media production entities. This doesn't mean that wannabe fighters can easily be swayed or influenced: the material they disseminate tends to reinforce their jihadist worldview – whatever the source. But it demonstrates that material produced by jihadist groups like Islamic State is not their only source of information, nor does it seem to have an exceptionally strong impact.

### *Personal Outreach*

Another important characteristic of wannabes' online behavior is attempts to reach out to foreign fighters in Syria or Iraq. From the wannabes' perspective, being in direct communication with fighters on the ground is an exciting way of learning about the conflict; it enables them to take part in the life of people they identify with; and it represents a first-hand source of information about how to get to Syria. The fighters in our sample used different methods for getting in touch with fighters. Some did so openly, through Tweets or by posting on fighters' Facebook pages. Others used Ask.fm, which allows for questions to be asked anonymously, or requested fighters to connect via private messaging services (such as KiK and Whatsapp) and Twitter's direct message function.

The ability to communicate with fighters is a relatively recent phenomenon. In earlier periods, wannabes used to be limited to hanging out in forums, talking to each other and consuming the latest news and videos from the frontlines. Early *jihobbyists* such as Younis Tsouli ('Irhabi007') gained prominence because they were seen as 'being close' to groups like al Qaeda in Iraq, though everyone realized they weren't members and hadn't ever stepped into a conflict zone.<sup>32</sup> Anwar al Awlaki, the radical preacher who made it his mission to incite homegrown 'lone wolves' in the late 2000s, was the first major jihadist figure to cultivate fanboys through his blog.<sup>33</sup> The first actual fighter to communicate with wannabes on a regular basis was Omar Hammami, an American who had joined al Shabab in Somalia, but his outreach efforts were isolated, erratic and, ultimately, short-lived.<sup>34</sup>

It remains unclear to what extent the communication between Syria wannabes and fighters is directed by jihadist groups and whether, therefore, the personal outreach is a deliberate and organized part of their social media campaigns. While it seems clear that many groups regard fighters' personal social media activity as desirable, we are confident that most of the fighters we have spoken to maintain their Twitter and Facebook accounts (more or less) autonomously. The communication between wannabes and fighters appears to be mostly self-initiated, and though faced with restrictions in relation to what they can and can't say, the exchanges are never entirely scripted or choreographed.

### *Fanboy Socialization*

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<sup>32</sup> See Rita Katz and Michael Kern, 'Terrorist 007, Exposed', *Washington Post*, 26 March 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Jarret M. Brachman and Alix N. Levine, 'You Too Can Be Awlaki', *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 35(1) (2011), pp. 27-32.

<sup>34</sup> J.M. Berger, 'Omar and Me: My Strange and Frustrating Relationship with an American Terrorist', *Foreign Policy*, 17 September 2013.

The third pillar of wannabe fighters' online ecosystem is interaction. Most of the time they spent online, the wannabes in our sample were busy sharing content, messaging friends, bouncing off ideas, or reading what others had posted. This came as no surprise. Social media is, by definition, social: its principal aim and purpose is to facilitate social interaction by electronic means. What struck us was the extent to which online interaction seemed to be central to their sense of being part of the movement, and how it played an important role in creating a sense of duty and mutual obligation. In many cases, online interaction spilled over into face to face meetings. In others, it was used to connect individuals or help them gain entry into Syria. In either case, what happened online (often) didn't remain online: its purpose and direction was to facilitate *offline* meetings through which online contacts and friendships could be mobilized and/or turned into 'action'.

This is nothing new. As long ago as 2007, when jihadists were hanging out in password-protected forums and Twitter and Facebook had only just started becoming household names, Marc Sageman identified social interaction as a key variable in online radicalization. He said:

[The internet] is based on interactivity between the members, which makes participants in [extremist online] forums change their mind. Some of the participants get so worked up that they declare themselves ready to be terrorists... Since this process takes place at home, often in the parental home, it facilitates the emergence of homegrown radicalization.<sup>35</sup>

The means and platforms through which online interaction takes place have changed, however. Since the forums have stopped being the virtual 'town squares' in which jihadist fanboys met and congregated, most of the fanboy socialization now takes place on open platforms like Twitter and then, often, migrates towards protected communications such as private messaging applications.

The impact of Islamic State media output on this process is marginal. The group's official videos and statements may, at times, be a 'conversation starter', but more important – and far more popular – are individual fighters' messages and pictures which the Islamic State controls only to a certain extent yet often spark prolonged interactions. Indeed, many of the conversations have nothing to do with the situation in Syria but are centered on day to day experiences, the flaws and failings of Western society, and casual jokes and banter.

The Islamic State's media campaign, therefore, is – at best – a background noise which may be important during the initial process of radicalisation but ceases to be central when fighters move from cognitive extremism to violent mobilization. The use of open platforms, direct communications with fighters, and interaction among each other are all crucial components of the wannabe fighters' online ecosystem. How they affect their decision to become foreign fighters will be the subject of the following chapters.

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<sup>35</sup> Marc Sageman before the U.S Senate, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Hearing on *Violent Islamist Extremism: The European Experience*, June 27, 2007, pp. 1-2.

## The Pains of Inaction

Much of the literature has focused on the Islamic State's official propaganda, a sophisticated enterprise coordinated through an extensive network of media offices and affiliated distributors.<sup>36</sup> With the notable exception of Erin Saltman and Melanie Smith's work on the recruitment of Western women to the conflict, little research has been done into how recruits interact with the less sophisticated, unofficial material produced and disseminated by sympathisers, much of which was produced before the establishment of the Caliphate. While this report does not have the capacity to fully investigate the extent to which the material affected the recruits desire to mobilise, an investigation of how recruits interacted with the material does illustrate a cycle of interaction that contributes towards our understanding of its effects on their desire to mobilise.

The cycle as a whole is referred to as *pains of inaction* and consists of three interrelated responses, which will be explained below; *moral outrage – inadequacy of non-violent activism – need for action*. Using primary social media data, which has been cited in the text and presented the appendix, the reactions of a sample of recruits can be analysed to provide an insight into the online material's radicalising effects.

### Recruit Reaction

While the motivations for foreign fighters have been shown to differ over time, a consistent theme promulgated by rebels groups and supporters has been that of injustice, both against Muslims as a whole and towards the Syrian people from the Assad regime, and the subsequent need to protect them. This has fuelled radical jihadist propaganda, which has used the draconian tactics of the Syrian state to instil powerful and compelling feelings of shame, humiliation, and unworthiness in the minds of recruits.

The reaction from recruits can be explained using *framing theory*. The theory focuses on the socialization, attraction and mobilization of supporters via the construction of a collective identity.<sup>37</sup> Events are framed through an 'interpretative schemata' which groups such as IS use to "locate, perceive, identify and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large."<sup>38</sup> Tarrow describes a three stage process stresses in which frames form around social occurrences of injustice.<sup>39</sup> First, a diagnostic frame is introduced that outlines problems as unjust and attributes blame; second, groups create a prognostic frame that proposes potential tactics and strategies to confront the previously diagnosed problem; finally, the group creates a persuasive, motivational rationale to prompt action.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> From the IS central leadership comes six media 'foundations' that have thirty-five provincial offices across the Maghreb and the Levant. See Winter (2015), p. 15.

<sup>37</sup> Tarrow, S., *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 3rd Ed., 2011, pp. 141-156

<sup>38</sup> Benford, R.D. & Snow, D., 'Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessments' *Annual Review of Sociology* Vol. 26, 2000, p. 614

<sup>39</sup> Tarrow (2011), p. 145

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 145

In this instance, the grievance coagulates around the “intra-Sunni solidarity norm” as described by Hegghammer.<sup>41</sup> The norm creates an inclination to support “fellow Muslims in need” and since being reinterpreted from a collective duty to an individual duty by Abdullah Azzam in the lead up to the Afghan-Soviet war,<sup>42</sup> has been consistently repeated by ideologues since the first throws of the Revolution.<sup>43</sup> This theme has remained prevalent in Islamic State’s current propaganda. *Victimhood* is identified by Winter as one of the six core themes found within the broader strategy.<sup>44</sup> The video circulated of the death of the Jordanian pilot Muadh al Kasabeh, edited together with sequences of coalition airstrikes to illustrate retributive violence theologically justified by *qisas*, is a notable example.<sup>45</sup> Scores of similar messaging can be found on the Internet, employing highly emotive terminology referencing persecution, oppression, injustice, and sexual violence.

In many cases, militant groups operating on the ground have referenced this themselves. An Australian foreign fighter with Islamic State featured in a video explaining the frame of mind that led him to migrate – or make *hijrah* – to Syria. In a video specifically aimed at Western and English-speaking Muslims, he said:

*“What am I doing? I have a good life here [in Australia]. I have a good job. I have an income. I have a car. I have a house. What sacrifice have I done for the sake of Allah? I can’t think of anything. All these nights we sleep comfortably [in the West], I thought about the people overseas and in the Muslim lands who are suffering, and this is when my journey really started beginning.”*<sup>46</sup>

This passage touches upon a number of common themes that are noticeable among all of the British fighters in our sample prior to their departure for Syria. The *pains of inaction* suffered by a particular fighter typically consist of three constituent components, or frames, which drive their radicalisation and desire to mobilise - moral outrage (diagnostic), frustration with the inadequacy of non-violent activism (prognostic), and a belief in the need for decisive action to defend the ummah (motivational rationale). Fighters tend to pass through all these emotional phases before feeling compelled to act – in this case, by joining militant groups in Syria.<sup>47</sup>

### *Moral outrage*

<sup>41</sup> Hegghammer, T., ‘Syria’s Foreign Fighters’, *Foreign Policy*, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013, last accessed on August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/12/09/syrias-foreign-fighters/>

<sup>42</sup> See Hegghammer (2010/2011)

<sup>43</sup> From as early as 2012, Saudi cleric Sheikh Mohammed al-Arifi, began issuing calls to jihad, particular to the West. See “Isis: Meet the cleric ‘encouraging British Muslims’ to fight jihad”, *Channel 4 News*, YouTube, June 26<sup>th</sup> 2014, last accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qnpfsr9p7n4&feature=youtu.be>

<sup>44</sup> Winter (2015), p. 25

<sup>45</sup> ‘Healing of the believers’ chests”, al-Furqan Foundation, February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2015

<sup>46</sup> ‘Stories from the land of the living: the story of Abu Khalid al-Cambodi from Australia,’ Al-Hayat Media, 21 April 2015

<sup>47</sup> See Appendix; Figure 1

There has been widespread revulsion over the manner, shape, and form of President Bashar al-Assad's attempts to suppress the Syrian uprising. This has permeated all sections of society, from individual actors, to human rights organisations up to the official pronouncements of Western governments. Among potential foreign fighters this has been coupled potently with a sense of personal obligation, responsibility, and guilt. Ali Kalantar was an 18-year-old student from Coventry who travelled to Syria in March 2014 in order to join Islamic State. Having reposted a number of images of the violence and suffering being bestowed upon innocent civilians,<sup>48</sup> a few weeks before his departure, Kalantar posted a nasheed (Islamic song) to Facebook, which revealed his growing sense of moral outrage at the situation in Syria.<sup>49</sup> The nasheed's lyrics state:

*"Oh my Ummah listen carefully because everything looks vague,  
Their bombs are thrown over us like poison  
And we have no sincere or honest friend,  
My son was shot in cold blood with no one to comfort or console me,  
Oh my father they stabbed you just as one drinks a sip of water,  
Tuba (a tree of paradise) is your home where there's no misery  
Oh my mother stop crying, your religion is rising up,  
I'm asking Allah to end this suffering and send down his soldiers (just as it)  
rains."<sup>50</sup>*

"This is amazing," Kalantar declared. Feeling a sense of obligation or duty towards the suffering of other Muslims is an intellectual process that has taken root in some Muslim communities through identification with an 'ummah consciousness.<sup>51</sup> This argues that all Muslims are united through a fraternity of the faithful, owing one another support, loyalty, and allegiance, particularly in times of turmoil or oppression.

That narrative has resonated especially loudly in the Syrian context. Mehdi Hasan, a foreign fighter who travelled from Portsmouth to join Islamic State, explained his reasons for going by referencing the use of sexual violence against those held prisoner by President Assad's forces. "There is a prison in Halab [Aleppo] with 300 female prisoners who are raped daily," he explained. "Some are pregnant and many have given birth. There are many of these prisons scattered over Syria. This is one small reason."<sup>52</sup> By 2015, such pronouncements would be met with incredulity given the Islamic State's systematic use of rape and sexual slavery as a standard practice and tool of oppression.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>48</sup> See Appendix; Figures 2, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Ali Al Farsi, Facebook profile, 19 February 2014. This profile is now offline but digitally archived in full by ICSR.

<sup>50</sup> 'SYRIA - Very Powerful Emotional Nasheed,' YouTube, 18 December 2012

<sup>51</sup> See Roy, O., *Globalized Islam: The Search For A New Ummah*, London: Hurst & Co, 2004; Kepel, G., *Jihad: the trail of political Islam*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2006

<sup>52</sup> Abu Dujana, Facebook post, 7 January 2014. This profile is now offline but digitally archived in full by ICSR.

<sup>53</sup> Callimachi, R., 'ISIS enshrines a theology of rape', *New York Times*, August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015, accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/14/world/middleeast/isis-enshrines-a-theology-of-rape.html>

The de facto leader of the Portsmouth group, twenty-three year old Ifthekar Jaman, repeatedly expressed his anger at the scale and urgency of the humanitarian crisis unfolding in the Levant.<sup>54</sup> Jaman also wrote about how “children were suffering” and of a “genocide” being conducted against the Muslims of Syria.<sup>55</sup> “May Allah make it easy for all the oppressed Muslims,” he wrote weeks before his departure. “May Allah bring a saviour soon.”<sup>56</sup> The group had grown increasingly frustrated with local imams who they felt were both unable and unqualified to adequately understand the situation in Syria. They took to the Internet to find alternative answers and listen to speeches from the Saudi cleric Mohammed al-Arifi, among others. Again, Arifi’s invectives are laden with highly emotive references to issues of honour, masculinity, and personal duty. The pronouncements drive a sense of righteous obligation borne of moral outrage:

*“No Muslim should accept to see a dear Muslim woman who was brought up on the Quran and Hijab being grappled and forcefully taken to the bedroom of a brutal tyrant. Which man can sleep or have his tears drop or feel a peace of mind while he hears of such circumstances befalling our Brothers and Sisters?”<sup>57</sup>*

Recruits ultimately begin to feel guilty about the relative comfort and security of their lives in Western society when contrasted against the suffering of Muslims abroad. In July 2013 another British fighter from Hounslow, Ismail Jabbar, wrote a lengthy post on Facebook that focused on the plight of the ummah. He wrote that he was in a “Bilad ash-Sham [land of Syria] state of mind,” while chastising Muslims in the West for letting their material comforts distract them from the suffering of the Syrian people.<sup>58</sup> In a subsequent message, Jabbar internalises this guilt and argues that he feels like a “coward” for “sleeping cosy” while Muslim women are subject to sexual violence around the world.<sup>59</sup> Although this was still quite some time before Jabbar finally migrated to Syria, he did embark on a more activist phase at this point, raising funds for humanitarian purposes.<sup>60</sup>

Although the process of Jabbar’s radicalisation was principally driven by the conflict in Syria, his sense of moral outrage and duty was not limited to events there. His horizons were global, expanding to encompass any number of different scenarios where Muslims are believed to be under attack. “I’m done with everyone and everything,” he wrote.<sup>61</sup> A similarly global outlook is evident in the online expressions of Mehdi Hasan and Ifthekar Jaman, along with another British fighter, Aseel Muthana, from Cardiff. All expressed their concern at Muslim suffering in Gaza, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Guantanamo Bay. “While your [sic] in bed, reflect on those tortured in Guantanamo and OUR brothers and sisters in OUR lands being raped and killed,” Muthana wrote.<sup>62</sup> That it considers itself a protective warden of the global ummah is

<sup>54</sup> Ifthekar Jaman Skype interview with Shiraz Maher, senior research fellow at ICSR (interview governed by research ethics application: REP (WSG)/13/14-10)

<sup>55</sup> Ifthekar Jaman (@ijaman08), Twitter, 19 February 2013. Full profile archived in full.

<sup>56</sup> Ifthekar Jaman (@ijaman08), Twitter, 22 February 2013. Full profile archived in full.

<sup>57</sup> Arifi, M., ‘Syria we will fight with you,’ YouTube, posted March 20<sup>th</sup> 2012, last accessed on August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oiYWEAyFW3E>

<sup>58</sup> Waran Aki’law, Facebook, July 2013. This profile is now offline but digitally archived in full by ICSR.

<sup>59</sup> Waran Aki’law, Facebook, August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013

<sup>60</sup> Waran Aki’law, Facebook, 2 August 2013

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., (2013)

<sup>62</sup> Abu Faris (@abufarriss), Twitter, November 2013

practical as well as theological; representing itself as a state with the ability to project power around the world (through its proxies) is a crucial aspect of justifying its legitimacy.<sup>63</sup>

### *Inadequacy of Non-Violent Activism*

Feelings of anger and outrage regarding the humanitarian crisis in Syria have been fuelled by the supposed indifference of the international community.<sup>64</sup> This can be thought of as 'radicalisation by omission,' where the expectation of international assistance has failed to materialise.<sup>65</sup>

Ifthekar Jaman was dismayed by what he considered a derogation of duty from Muslim rulers towards the Muslims of Syria. "Why haven't the Saudi government sent their armies to support the Syrians?" he asked. "Why are the Saudi government quietly on the side while the ummah is suffering?"<sup>66</sup> Their apparent indifference towards the Syrians led him to conclude, "the Saudi government are the worst examples."<sup>67</sup>

In this case individual agents feel a greater sense of personal responsibility and obligation to take matters into their own hands, engaging in a form of vigilante militarism. "Sorry to say, but sending cereal does not stop this brutality," wrote Mehdi Hasan shortly after arriving in Syria. "A bullet to the head is far more effective."<sup>68</sup> Ifthekar Jaman was more sober in his assessment, recognising the virtue of charity – albeit in limited form. "Ya ikhwaani [oh brothers], give charity as much as you can," he urged his twitter followers. "But don't think you've done your duty. Charity doesn't prevent a tank, you do."<sup>69</sup>

The corollary is clear - while Muslims can give to charity, they should not consider this as sufficient to discharge their obligations towards the Syrian people. Their duties go further because the current situation is unbearable and the status quo can neither reverse nor adequately address the humanitarian suffering. Non-violent activism is therefore out-dated and needs to be replaced with a more direct form of confrontation.

### *Need for Effective Action*

Primed with sufficient outrage but disillusioned with the prevailing political climate, radicalised individuals conclude that the only solution available to them is to become fighters. This not only makes a tangible and practical change to the problem, as they perceive it, but is also a decision

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<sup>63</sup> Winter, C., 'How the Islamic State makes sure you pay attention to it', *War on the Rocks*, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015, accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://warontherocks.com/2015/02/how-the-islamic-state-makes-sure-you-pay-attention-to-it/>

<sup>64</sup> 'The World's pitiful response to Syria's refugee crisis', *Amnesty International*, December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014, last accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2014/12/world-s-pitiful-response-syria-s-refugee-crisis/>

<sup>65</sup> The opposite might be thought of as 'radicalisation by commission,' that is, for example, radicalisation caused by our participation in the Iraq war.

<sup>66</sup> Ifthekar Jaman (@ijaman08), Twitter, 6 February 2013

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Abu Dujana, Facebook post, 7 January 2014

<sup>69</sup> Ifthekar Jaman (@ijaman08), Twitter, 17 July 2013; See Appendix; Figure 4



believed to be invested with unparalleled virtues and divine rewards.<sup>70</sup> Quite often these decisions to join militant groups are also bound up with notions of masculinity and valour.<sup>71</sup> As Deeyah Khan notes, modern media tends to provide a message for men of heroism that is defined through “control, independence and the ability to commit violence, from superheroes to crime dramas.”<sup>72</sup> An interplay occurs between respect and fear – those that feel disrespected want to be feared. This is summed up in a tweet from Ali Kalantar: - “running away from jihad will not save you from death. You can die as a coward or you can die as a martyr.”<sup>73</sup> Ismail Jabber expressed similar sentiments, writing, “the ummah is bleeding and now its time to findbout [sic] who are the lions, cats and snakes [sic].”<sup>74</sup>

For Mehdi Hasan, it no longer made sense to remain in the United Kingdom. He felt obligated to be in Syria and had come to regard Britain as a country where it was impermissible for Muslims to live permanently.<sup>75</sup> Instead, his loyalty was now owed to the “micro Caliphates” established all over the world.<sup>76</sup> His decision to migrate to Syria was also mixed with a degree of fatalism, stemming from normative Islamic belief that an individual’s lifespan is predestined and fixed.<sup>77</sup> As Kalantar argued, “running away from jihad will not save you from death.” As the moment is already fixed, a true believer should migrate to the battlefields not only to demonstrate their faith, but to also relieve the suffering of the ummah. Mehdi Hasan explained this clearly in a Facebook post arguing, “I’m gonna do my best to help ppl [sic], my death is written. Ifthekar fought his first battle after 5 months in jihad and got shadah [martyrdom] whilst an azeri bro fought in jihad for 15 years and he got shadah in the same battle.”<sup>78</sup>

Ifthekar Jaman also wrote extensively on how the *pains of inaction* involved missing out on the supposed rewards of a holy warrior and martyr. “The gates of jannah [paradise] will be so amazing that you would stand in awe for years admiring its beauty,” he wrote. “This is just the gates. Now imagine jannah, with the small imagination we have been given, waterfalls from high skies, valleys with the most beautiful plants, mountains.”<sup>79</sup> Jaman frequently reminded his readers about the virtuous of jihad, martyrdom, and the nirvana of paradise. Ismail Jabber went further by expressing his guilt at failing to act, feeling that the longer he avoided jihad, the more *jahil* (or ignorant) he was becoming. His use of the term *jahil* is particularly relevant here because it refers to the idolatrous and polytheistic state of pre-Islamic Arabia, generally held by Muslims to have been an era of spiritual darkness and moral decay. “I’ve seen light and [yet] become jahil,” Jabber wrote. “But this time I’m going to the light even if it has to burn me.”<sup>80</sup> It is clear that Jabber was wrestling with the various phases of his radicalisation – the sense of duty,

<sup>70</sup> See Appendix; Figure 5

<sup>71</sup> See Appendix; Figure 6

<sup>72</sup> Khan, D., ‘Jihad Masculinity’, Huffington Post Blog, July 10<sup>th</sup> 2015, last accessed August 26<sup>th</sup> 2015, at [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/deeyah-khan/jihad-deeyah-khan\\_b\\_7770578.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/deeyah-khan/jihad-deeyah-khan_b_7770578.html)

<sup>73</sup> Ali Kalantar (RandomGuyWithASuit/@AliAlfarsiii), Twitter, 29 October 2014

<sup>74</sup> Waran Aki’law, Facebook, 16 November 2013

<sup>75</sup> Mehdi Hasan (@AbuDujana), Twitter, 25 August 2013

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 22 November 2012

<sup>77</sup> See Watt, W., ‘Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam’, *The Muslim World*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 1946, pp. 124-152. Also see Appendix; Figure 7

<sup>78</sup> Abu Dujana, Facebook post, 7 January 2014

<sup>79</sup> Ifthekar Jaman (@ijaman08), Twitter, 27 January 2013

<sup>80</sup> Waran Aki’law, Facebook, 2 August 2013

moral compulsion, frustration, and pain of inaction, versus social, emotional, and familial pressures to stay. Yet, within two months of deciding he would have to “go to the light,” Jabber was fighting in Syria.

The effect that events in Syria and Iraq, projected through improvised and startling propaganda materials, have had on our sample of foreign fighters’ desire to travel to the Levant is clear. It is not enough to affect the decision to travel however. Through an exposition of what this report describes as *fighting communities*, the next section will illustrate how the online interactions within and between peer groups of recruits and fighters creates a stake in the conflict, thus cementing the decision to travel in the recruit’s mind.

## Fighting Communities

The previous chapter illustrates how the cumulative effects of interactions with online propaganda create *pains of inaction* among recruits. This creates a moral crisis that has a profound effect on their desire to mobilise. A second activity that this report argues contributes towards radicalisation, specifically the decision to mobilise, is interaction within *fighting communities* made up of recruits and fighters already in theatre.

Using modern information technology and continually evolving social media platforms, foreign fighters and recruits can, for the first time, interact with each other directly in real time. Rather than relying on the writings, audio recordings and video lectures of learned but inaccessible ideologues, recruits can now receive wisdom and encouragement directly and on a personalised basis. This unprecedented accessibility allows recruits to build a stake in the conflict, connecting with fighters before seeking to emulate them. Using social media data, again cited in text and presented in the appendix, this chapter will illustrate how these *fighting communities* are created, how they operate and how the dynamics within them contribute towards radicalisation of the recruit.

### Platforms

The research has identified two strands of interaction that occur within these *fighting communities*, which this report categorises as *anonymous* and *public*. The platforms used provide the fighter with the opportunity to proselytise his group's message while giving personal advice and guidance to recruits. These are not mutually exclusive interactions, however they are at times distinctive within the data.

The *anonymous* strand is the interaction of recruits and fighters through platforms with anonymity functions, the most prevalent of which is Ask.fm. This platform asks users to set up an account, provide a name/alias and a short biography, for which the individual decides upon the level of discretion shown. Users then receive questions from anonymous contributors; once the user has responded, both the question and the answer are posted onto the users timeline, concealing the identity of the questioner and providing a rolling commentary. Given the nature of the platform, it is the strand most commonly used by fighters to give advice across a range of topics.

The *public* strand involves the interactions of potential and actual foreign fighters over platforms that are open, in which all participants are identified through their usernames and the personal information they have provided. The most commonly utilised platform for this has been Twitter. Twitter does have a privacy function, however none of the fighters in our sample had utilised it. This is logical; for the foreign fighter, messaging over open platforms is 'framing' in itself. Openly flaunting violent and 'illegal' activity is a central tenet to the identity of the foreign fighter, and a common behaviour for an individual actively trying to disavow the West.

### *Anonymous Interaction*

With regard the *anonymous* strand, given the sheer volume of data collected, a complete identification of every topic was not possible.<sup>81</sup> The research identified topics that separate into two broad categories, both of which illuminate the role that the fighter plays in the community – *advice* and *inspiration*. *Advice* falls into *hijrah* and non-*hijrah* related topics, both of which are important. *Hijrah* related enquiries include the permissibility of female mobilisation, finances, logistics of travel and fighting experience.<sup>82</sup> Non-*hijrah* related advice tends to cover topics in which the contributor has identified a lack of guidance in navigating everyday domestic issues from schooling to personal loans.<sup>83</sup>

*Inspiration* is a nebulous category in which recruits look to relate with the actual fighters on more emotive terms. This can be through requests for spiritual and moral support on matters such as mitigating against family reaction to migration and killing fellow Muslims, to at times just sharing affection in ways synonymous with ‘in-group love.’<sup>84</sup>

### *Public Interaction*

The *public* strand of interactions offers a different perspective on the importance of contacts between fighters and recruits. The fighter becomes a chameleon of different personas, from the missionary jihadist to the devoted martyr. In all the cases collected, members of the sample are seen interacting with other members of the sample, some of whom have already made *hijrah*. In some cases, a progression and intensification of views is visible, and at other times not. Other interactions shown here are between fighters both of whom have already travelled. Interaction done openly such as this sends an empowering message to recruits and thus needs to be included.

- *Mashadhur Choudhary and Ifthekar Jaman*

Mashadhur Choudhury was a member of the ‘Portsmouth cluster’ of fighters who travelled at different times to Syria in 2013. Choudhary is the only member of the sample to have been arrested, charged and sentenced to four years in prison on his return from Syria, and thus more knowledge of his trajectory is known. According to court documents, plans to travel developed during the summer of 2013, culminating in his departure in the October.<sup>85</sup> His interlocutor was Ifthekar Jaman, also in our sample, who had travelled to the region in May 2013. Choudhury only remained in the Levant for two weeks before allegedly being rejected as a recruit. Thus his Ask.fm and his twitter do not reflect his time in theatre.

<sup>81</sup> Over ten thousand unique inquiries, stored by the ICSR in full, were collected and stored in the database. This dissertation did not have the scope to code the entire dataset.

<sup>82</sup> All of the interactions are reproduced with the original spelling and grammatical errors. See Appendix; Figures 8, 9.

<sup>83</sup> Appendix; Figures 10, 11

<sup>84</sup> Sageman identifies love for the in-group as a strong motivating factor in the decision to commit violence. See Sageman, M., *Understanding Terror Networks*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania University Press, 2004. See Appendix; Figures 12, 13.

<sup>85</sup> Casciani, D., ‘Mashadhur Choudhary: Serial liar and jihadist’, *BBC News*, May 20<sup>th</sup> 2014, accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-27491066>

His twitter account is a valuable example of online interactions with actual fighters however, illustrating the offline interactions that were taking place in the lead up to his departure, which will be focused on more in the next chapter. His online interaction with fellow members of the Portsmouth cluster was an inevitable result of their friendship. With Jaman, they range from the banal matters of arranging meeting times at their mosque, debates and disagreement, and indications of potentially making *hijrah*.<sup>86</sup>

- *Aseel Muthana*

Aseel Muthana, along with his brother Nasser Muthanna, were two fighters from Cardiff who came to have associations with the Portsmouth cluster. Aseel's early twitter interactions demonstrate an interest in foreign fighters months before making *hijrah*. During the month of November, Aseel retweeted or interacted with five different foreign fighters, one of which was his brother Nasser. Four of those fighters originate from the UK while the other, Abu Fulan, was Danish.<sup>87</sup> In November he reached out to Abu Qa'qaa, a fighter from the UK, seeking a link to his Tumblr blog 'Paladin of Jihad' which documented his transition from recruit to fighter and his subsequent experiences in the Levant.<sup>88</sup> As his tweets show, Aseel was an active twitter contributor within the milieu he became apart of.<sup>89</sup>

### Understanding the Dynamics

The dynamics within the *fighting community* that contribute towards the decision to mobilise can be conceptualised on two levels. The macro level describes the broader effects the new media ecology on the socialisation of individuals, in this instance recruits interested in becoming foreign fighters. The micro level describes the effects that increased accessibility to foreign fighters has on the recruit's attitudes towards the conflict and the responsibilities he has towards his fellow Muslims.

### *The New Media Ecology*

The phrase 'Web 2.0' is commonly cited in the literature on online radicalisation and refers to the World Wide Web's transition during the new millennium into the second generation, a space that now "encompasses a growing array of interactive communications systems facilitated by a rapidly expanding set of platforms."<sup>90</sup> The period gave birth to the platforms that we recognise today – "numerous websites, blogs, forums and message boards"<sup>91</sup> – while laying the foundation for the most modern iterations of apps and instant messaging services that have seamlessly

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<sup>86</sup> See Appendix; Figures 14, 15, 16

<sup>87</sup> See Appendix; Figures 17, 18

<sup>88</sup> This blog is catalogued in full by the ICSR. See Appendix; Figure 19

<sup>89</sup> See Appendix; Figures 20, 21

<sup>90</sup> Amble, J.C., "Combating terrorism in the new media environment", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 35(5), 2012, p. 339

<sup>91</sup> Ducol, B., "Uncovering the French-speaking Jihadisphere: An exploratory analysis", *Media, War and Conflict* Vol. 5(1), 2012, p. 51

interwoven into our “new media ecology.”<sup>92</sup> Social media, as Haidt notes, makes it “extraordinarily easy to join crusades, express solidarity and outrage, and shun traitors.”<sup>93</sup> Facebook was founded in 2004, for example; this means that the first wave of students who spent their formative years using the platform are now reaching early adulthood, the prime demographic for mobilisation.<sup>94</sup> Haidt goes on to argue that these first true “social-media natives” are different in how they share and engage with friends over moral judgments, news stories, and pro-social endeavours compared the previous generation, whose dominant technology was television.<sup>95</sup>

This has undoubtedly affected their socialisation. For Shapiro and Margolin, ‘standing out’ i.e. developing an identity while pursuing autonomy, and ‘fitting in’ i.e. finding acceptance from peers through comfortable affiliations, are the paradoxical yet crucial tasks in an individual’s social development during adolescents.<sup>96</sup> For the authors, this clearly intersects in the modern age with the use of these platforms, relating to adolescents’ social connectivity and identity development more so than previous communications technologies. For Shapiro and Margolin, sociability, self-esteem and the nature of the SNS feedback act as important potential moderators, affecting the identity creation of the individual as well as the development of the offline interactions.<sup>97</sup>

A new report the Pew Research Centre that explored the “new contours of friendship in the digital age” supports these findings.<sup>98</sup> Rather than the traditional perception that teenagers are in some way wasting time online, the study indicates not just that new relationships are being created but that offline, real world friendships are being strengthened. This appears to follow a broader sociological trend that teenagers are spending less time face-to-face and that the online world provides a space for them to ‘hang-out’ more.<sup>99</sup> One of the authors, Lenhart, claimed that “many teenagers can’t choose to go and physically be with their friends...any number of things may contribute to teenagers having fewer opportunities to gather physically than they once did, from changes in drivers’ licensing to genuinely unsafe neighbourhoods to a parental perception that allowing a teenager the freedom to roam freely by bike or on foot is less safe than it was in

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<sup>92</sup> See Awan, A. et al., *Radicalisation and Media: Connectivity and terrorism in the new media ecology*, Routledge, Oxford, 2011.

<sup>93</sup> Haidt, J., Lukianoff, G., ‘The Coddling of the American Mind’, *The Atlantic*, September 2015, last accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/09/the-coddling-of-the-american-mind/399356/>

<sup>94</sup>  
<sup>95</sup> Ibid., (2015)

<sup>96</sup> Shapiro, L.A.S, Margolin, G., ‘Growing Up Wired: Social Networking Sites and Adolescent Psychosocial Development’, *Clinical Child Family Psychological Review*, (17), 2014, p. 1

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. (2014)

<sup>98</sup> Lenhart, A. et al, ‘Teens, Technology & Friendships: Video games, social media and mobile phones play an integral role in how teens meet and interact with friends’, *Pew Research Centre*, August, 2015, accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://www.pewinternet.org/files/2015/08/Teens-and-Friendships-FINAL2.pdf>, p. 2.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. (2015)

the past.”<sup>100</sup> “The online space is a way of expanding teenagers’ ability to be with friends when they aren’t able to be with them in person.”<sup>101</sup>

From the perspective of radicalisation, this behaviour creates online milieus that act as echo chambers in which interactions based on ‘in-group love’ and/or ‘out-group hate’ can build powerful social bonds, especially in the case of violent extremism. Brewer notes that equilibrium is achieved through “identification with distinctive social groups that meet both needs simultaneously. Inclusion needs are satisfied by assimilation within the group while differentiation is satisfied by intergroup distinctions.”<sup>102</sup> To devolve to violence is an attempt to earn acceptance, respect and ultimately love within the group one is attempting to identify with. Another dynamic, provided by McCauley and Moskalenko and reiterated by Sageman, is that of the ‘risky shift.’ When a group initially begins to form, there is an increased level of agreement, and a ‘shift’ in opinion from the moderate to the extreme.<sup>103</sup> Sageman expands on this theory by focusing in on the level of the individual. Extremists, he argues, radicalise in order to attain identity within the “clique” rather than due to ideology or ‘out-group’ animosity. Grievances within the clique become amplified, bonds become stronger and values become more insular and rejectionist towards the outside world.<sup>104</sup>

All of this evidence chimes with the experiences of the recruits in our sample. Each recruit had significant social media footprints, indicating a large amount of time spent online, and used the mediums to expand their social circles. It was through Twitter, for example, that the Manchester duo of Abu Qa’qaa and Raphael Hostey came across Ifthekar Jaman and the Portsmouth cluster, with whom they would subsequently meet and receive *tazkiyyah*.<sup>105</sup> Tam Hussein, writing about the West London fighter Fatlum Shakalu, noted this about the group from which he emerged, that is applicable to each of the clusters in our sample:

*“The [online/offline] connections they were making, the culture they were creating...they had their own terminology, they wore their Salafi-Jihadism on their robes, blended it with rebellious Roadmannism, garnished it with a bit of Anwar Awlaki, Quran, Sunnah and a bit of thug life. They could yearn desperately for forgiveness and paradise, and in their youthful ardour want a sense of belonging and adventure.”*<sup>106</sup>

### *Building a Stake in the Conflict*

<sup>100</sup> Dell’Antonia, K.J., ‘Teenagers Leading Happy, Connected Lives Online’, *The New York Times*, August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015, last accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at <http://parenting.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/08/06/teenagers-leading-happy-connected-lives-online/>

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. (2015)

<sup>102</sup> Brewer, M. B., ‘In-group Identification and Conflict: When does In-group Love Become Out-group Hate’, In *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction*, ed. by Ashmore, E., et al., Oxford: OUP, 2001, p. 43

<sup>103</sup> McCauley, M., & Moskalenko, S., “Mechanisms of Political Radicalization,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 20, 2008, p. 421

<sup>104</sup> Sageman, M., “The Next Generation of Terror,” *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 165, 2008, p. 41

<sup>105</sup> This is further explained in Chapter Three.

<sup>106</sup> Hussein (2015)

This section looks to further the work of Brachman and Levine with regard the relationship between jihadist ideologues and potential radicals by arguing that the foreign fighter represents the progression of a dynamic they first identified in 2011.<sup>107</sup> Consider this quote from their 2011 article 'You Too Can Be Awlaki':

*Youth who are seeking role models need someone who is easier to emulate, a figure that they can become without too much work or thought, and who makes them feel as if they are producing something meaningful and relevant.*<sup>108</sup>

While capturing the essence of the recruit's psychology, the quote is not related to foreign fighters but the relationship between online jihadist activists, a nuanced and important difference. Originally, the interactions between jihadist ideologues and recruits were of a style befitting that of producer and consumer - the 'heavy-weight' ideologues such as Abdullah Azzam and Abu Muhammed al-Maqdisi produced literature and speeches that were disseminated around the world for potential jihadists to read and listen to. The ideologues thus relied on interlocutors to connect them with their global audience. The Committee for Advice and Reform, for example, was Osama Bin Laden's pressure group based in London that printed and provided materials to would-be jihadists across the UK.<sup>109</sup> Given the decentralised nature of the transnational jihadist network, especially with the emergence of Al Qaeda, the culture of contact and accessibility to the most influential ideologues was non-existent.

The advent of this interface has had a profound effect on the relationship between the ideologue and the potential jihadist and paved the way for the creation of the 'Celebrity Shaykh.'<sup>110</sup> The original ideologues were learned scholars with high levels of legitimacy but low levels of accessibility. That is not to say that the advent of information technologies affected their influence - far from it.<sup>111</sup> However, the face of jihadism did begin to change. Younger, more technologically savvy preachers were able to substitute theological and scholarly depth with charisma and translatability. Soon, potential jihadists could follow these ideologues online, watch and read their material and seek to emulate them in a way not previously possible.<sup>112</sup> They could also interact with fellow enthusiasts in password-protected forums and chat-rooms, whose influence on radicalisation has been well established in the literature.<sup>113</sup>

The most prominent example of this trend was Anwar al-Awlaki, arguably the most influential English language propagandist of his generation.<sup>114</sup> Brachman and Levine note a number of

<sup>107</sup> Brachman, J.M., Levine, A.N., 'You Too Can Be Awlaki!', *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 1, Winter 2011, pp. 25-46

<sup>108</sup> Brachman and Levine (2011), p. 30

<sup>109</sup> See Curtis, M., *Secret Affairs: Britain's Collusion with Radical Islam*, London: Serpent's Tail, 2012.

<sup>110</sup> Brachman and Levine (2011), p. 29

<sup>111</sup> Maqdisi, Abu Bak Naji, Osama Bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam remain heavily cited by all Sunni insurgent groups, regardless of their allegiances.

<sup>112</sup> See Meleagrou-Hitchens, A., 'As American as Apple Pie: How Anwar al-Awlaki became the Face of Western Jihad', *ICSR: London*, 2011

<sup>113</sup> See Stevens, T., & Neumann, P., 'Countering Online Radicalisation: A Strategy for Action,' ICSR: London, 2009

<sup>114</sup> Roshonora Choudhary, for example, sentenced to life in prison for the attempted murder of Steven Pimms MP for his vote in favour of the Iraq war, cited the lectures of Awlaki as a direct influence in her interviews with police.



factors that contributed towards his accessibility. First was the style of his numerous online videos, lectures and recordings, “a caricature of previous generations of hard-line Salafi clerics.”<sup>115</sup> Awlaki lacked the knowledge and expertise of his forbearers, but was perceived as more authentic than the Sheikhs he looked to emulate.<sup>116</sup> The messages retained the piety but lost the religiosity, which attracted an audience that lacked the depth of education required to appreciate the ‘heavy-weight’ ideologues of previous generations.<sup>117</sup> His “back-to-basics” approach was also very effective, impacting on both emotional and intellectual levels.<sup>118</sup> This increased accessibility through technology allowed recruits to emulate their ideologues and carry the momentum of the jihadist movement without the precondition of entrenched theological and scholarly legitimacy.

This inverse relationship between scholarly legitimacy and accessibility has reached its zenith with the advent of modern *fighting communities*. Actual foreign fighters have become the lightest of the “lite sheikhs” that Brachman and Levine theorised, the effectiveness of their messaging and approach a result of the sheer level of accessibility they afford online. An irony is at play here. In his exhaustive investigation into the mobilisation of Fatlum Shakalu, Hussein notes a high number of recruits without the required skill set to properly interpret the text. For the “born again devotee”, alienated from the community and inspired by the disembodied fighter living in the Levant, “no middle man was required to distil that seemingly contradictory mass of Prophetic sayings and Quranic verses.”<sup>119</sup>

Referring back to the earlier quote, the primed individuals are looking for “role models” to emulate; the ease with which these recruits can interact with the actual fighters, who are able to provide easy answers to difficult questions, builds familiarity trust between the fighter and the recruit, strengthening the decision of the fighter to travel. While offering the opportunity to produce actions that are ‘meaningful and relevant’, the communities elicit the characteristics of the ‘in-group’, echo chambers in which the themes and sentiments intensify and result in increased chances of radicalisation.

The first two chapters have shown how online interactions can affect the desire and decision of the recruit to mobilise. The third chapter will argue that the transition from decision to action cannot be explained with recourse to the Internet, and instead relies on offline interactions within and between peer groups.

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<sup>115</sup> Brachman and Levine (2011), p. 27

<sup>116</sup> Brachman and Levine (2011), p. 27

<sup>117</sup> Brachman and Levine (2011), p. 28

<sup>118</sup> Brachman and Levine (2011), p. 28

<sup>119</sup> Hussein (2015)

## On and Offline

In July 2015, Syed Choudhary was jailed for plotting to travel to join Islamic State. The prosecution described how the teenager began researching the conflict online, accessing websites such as '10 reasons to join ISIS' and 'Turkey travel, Jihadist Highway.'<sup>120</sup> His lawyer noted that Choudhary "was openly using Facebook and Twitter accounts that could link to him to material that was highly incriminating. There appears to be no attempt at all to disguise his involvement or insulate himself from detection."<sup>121</sup> Syed's case can be understood with reference to the last two chapters, which have sought to demonstrate how online activity can affect the desire and decision to become a foreign fighter. However, a detail in the case perfectly encapsulates the argument of this chapter and the driving thesis of the report; when first arrested in December 2014, Choudhary told police that the reason that he had not travelled was because he had not found anyone trustworthy to travel with.<sup>122</sup> Thus, while the online activity may affect the desire and decision to travel, overwhelming evidence suggests that the actual mobilisation relies on offline interactions. Having explained the dynamics behind this mechanism, the chapter will use recent historical data to illustrate two key examples in which offline interactions appear central to the recruit's transition from decision to action.

### Explaining the Dynamics

The dynamics of offline interactions, while not a new phenomenon, represents a key factor in the practical mobilisation of foreign fighters. While the online *fighting communities* help to build a commitment to the cause through virtual connections, the peer-to-peer relationships are crucial in facilitating the transition from decision to actual mobilisation. Evidence suggests that this is practical as well as psychological; resources and logistics become easier to organise in a group than individually. The same goes for deception; convincing concerned relatives or friends that your intentions and actions are benign may become more plausible if part of a small group of 'trusted' peers.

This is a trend that has become central to the way that mobilisation has come to be understood. In America, a minority within the Somali-American population in the suburbs around Minneapolis have actively facilitated the recruitment of fighters to Islamic State, with the most recent arrests occurring in mid-April 2015.<sup>123</sup> At least 59 Belgian foreign fighters were affiliated with *Sharia4Belgium*, with most originating out of the geographical axis of Antwerp, Mechelen, Vilvorde and Brussels.<sup>124</sup> Of the eighteen Swedish fighters identified by the Combating Terrorism Center in 2013, eleven were from two small neighbouring suburbs of Gothenburg –

<sup>120</sup> Spillet, R., 'Teenager who planned to join ISIS in Syria and said 'all gay people should be killed' is jailed for more than three years', *Mail Online*, July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015, accessed August 26<sup>th</sup> 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3152172/Teenager-planned-join-ISIS-jailed-three-years.html>

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. (2015)

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. (2015)

<sup>123</sup> Johnson, K., & Bacon, J., 'Six arrested in anti-terrorism sweep, latest in string of such cases', *USA Today*, April 20<sup>th</sup> 2015, accessed August 26<sup>th</sup> 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/04/19/federal-agents-terror-sweep-minneapolis-san-diego/26054419/>

<sup>124</sup> Van Ostaeyen, P., 'Belgian Fighters in Syria and Iraq – April 2015,' April 5<sup>th</sup> 2015, accessed April 26<sup>th</sup> 2015, at <https://pietervanostaeyen.wordpress.com/?s=belgian+foreign+fighters&submit=Search>

Angered and Bergsjön – leading Magnus Norrell to conclude that recruitment in Sweden occurred through ties of friendship.<sup>125</sup> In discussing *Sharia4Holland*, the AIVD concluded that these movements have created “an environment in which people with similar ideas meet and develop radical ideas into jihadist ideologies. This group dynamic has led to a rapid radicalization of many individuals as well as concrete attempts to join the jihad in Syria.”<sup>126</sup>

The creation of strong personal bonds is important, for two reasons. Firstly, they facilitate the first psychological step into “high risk activism” as described by Douglas McAdam.<sup>127</sup> In McAdam’s model, the individual first becomes primed through socialisation with friends and family, making them receptive to new political attitudes. When offline contact with activists follows, the chances of low-risk activism increases. For the individual to then transition into high-risk activism, such as mobilisation to fight jihad, ‘biographical availability’ i.e. “the absence of personal constraints that may increase the costs and risks of movement participation, such as full-time employment, marriage, and family responsibilities” becomes the limiting factor.<sup>128</sup> This paper suggests that the intensely existential and emotive nature of the current conflict affects the extent to which ‘biographical availability’ becomes a limiting factor. Fighters have shown a willingness to overcome these barriers in unprecedented ways, including uprooting entire families, including young children and pregnant women, and travelling to Syria.<sup>129</sup>

The strong personal bonds also create the basis for the potential recruits to receive *tazkiyyah*. This is best understood as “reference” or “guarantee” for a prospective fighter that establishes their sincerity and bona fides. For the individual receiving *tazkiyyah* it immediately validates their commitment and standing to a fighting group to whom they would otherwise be entirely unknown. For the individual providing *tazkiyyah* it also denotes their trust in, and loyalty towards, the recipient. *Tazkiyyah* is provided, therefore, by an actual fighter in support of a recruit. Militant groups often require these references both as a security requirement to mitigate against spies, but also to ensure the recruit is devotionally committed.

The underlying element to these dynamics, one that ultimately explains the success or failure of any relationship, and one that can be illustrated to have been crucial in the recruitment of these individuals, is trust. Online interactions become limited in this regard; using jihadi web forums as an example, Hegghammer argues, “the scarcity of non-verbal cues... facilitates deceptive mimicry which undermines the interpersonal trust for sensitive transactions.”<sup>130</sup> While not quite to the same degree given the more personal nature of the interactions between fighter and recruit,

<sup>125</sup> Norrell quote in Gudmondson, P., ‘The Swedish Foreign Fighter Contingent in Syria’, *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel*, September 24<sup>th</sup> 2013, accessed April 26<sup>th</sup> 2015, at <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-swedish-foreign-fighter-contingent-in-syria>

<sup>126</sup> “Reisbewegingen jihadistisch terrorisme,” AIVD statement on movements of terrorism, General Intelligence and Security Service of the Netherlands, September 2013.

<sup>127</sup> McAdam, D., ‘Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer,’ *American Journal of Sociology*, Volume 92, Issue 1, 1986, pp. 64-90

<sup>128</sup> *ibid.* p. 70

<sup>129</sup> Brooks-Pollock, T., ‘Yes we have joined ISIS say missing British family of 12 who fled to Syria’, *The Independent*, July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015, accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/yes-we-have-joined-isis-say-missing-british-family-of-12-who-fled-to-syria-luton-islamic-state-isis-isil-iraq-10365915.html>

<sup>130</sup> Hegghammer, T., ‘Interpersonal Trust on Jihadi Internet Forums’, Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2014, accessed March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015 [http://hegghammer.com/\\_files/Interpersonal\\_trust.pdf](http://hegghammer.com/_files/Interpersonal_trust.pdf).

trust reaches a threshold without face-to-face interactions. Merari advances the argument, claiming that trust precipitates violence. The decision to commit an extreme act of violence, for example a suicide bombing, is a result of the desire to gain social credibility within the group.<sup>131</sup> Love for both the group and the cause, in this case the protection of the *ummah*, explains the desire and decision to violently mobilise.

Using evidence procured through social media analysis and news coverage, three examples stand out as illustrating the importance of offline contacts – the Coventry Cluster, the Portsmouth and Manchester Network, and the West London Cluster.

## The Data

### *Overview of British Fighters*

Before illustrating two examples of how clusters work in facilitating travel, a brief glance at the total number of British fighters collected provides some inferences that support the thesis and while countering the ‘internet causality’ explanation. Of the 123 British fighters in the database for whom information could be procured, fifty-seven fighters travelled with or knew at least one other fighter before mobilising. This supports the thesis in two ways. First is the obvious case that evidence of individuals travelling in group’s supports the offline interaction thesis. Second, that information of the travel plans for the other sixty-six could not be procured through open source methods suggests that they were not avid users of social media, thus negating the idea that online interactions play such a crucial role. Two examples will now be illustrated to show how offline interactions can influence mobilisation.

### *The Coventry Cluster*

The offline behaviour of Ali Kalantar, a foreign fighter from Coventry, chimes with the driving thesis. In chapter one, we described the extent to which Ali Kalanta’s desire and decision to mobilise were affected by his interactions with online propaganda. What appears to have been a crucial element in his decision to mobilise, however, was his long-term friendship with two friends from home, Rashed Amani and Mohammed Hadi, who travelled with him. Interactions with a radical imam at a local mosque are also cited as potential influences by his family, who perceived changes in Kalantar’s behaviour as originating from this contact.

Reports suggest that Kalantar asked to borrow his passport from his parents in order to fill out university related documents, while asking to borrow £1000 from his brother in order to pay for a new laptop.<sup>132</sup> This indicates that Kalantar was not considered a risk by his loved ones, who

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<sup>131</sup> See Merari, A., ‘Social, organizational and psychological factors in suicide terrorism,’ in Bjørge, T. ed., *Root Causes of Terrorism: Myths, Realities and Ways Forward*, Oxford, Routledge, 2005.

<sup>132</sup> Taher, A., et al., ‘British jihadist who married one of the 16-year-old Manchester ‘terror twins’ is ‘killed fighting for ISIS in Iraq’, *Mail Online*, December 6<sup>th</sup> 2014, accessed April 26<sup>th</sup> 2015, at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2863521/British-jihadist-married-one-16-year-old-Manchester-terror-twins-Syria-killed-fighting-ISIS-Iraq.html>

perhaps had no indication that Kalantar was in any way radicalised. This is a common theme for foreign fighters around the world; the family of teenager Abdullah Emir, an Australian convert to Islam who travelled to Syria and became the frontman of at least two ISIS videos, believed that he had gone on a fishing trip. The family only became aware of his intentions when he contacted them from Turkey, days before crossing the border into Syria.<sup>133</sup>

It also indicates the importance of offline interactions in facilitating mobilisation, rather than irrational fanaticism. Reports suggest that Mohammed Baryalei, a known foreign fighter recruiter in Sydney, heavily influenced Elmir's rapid radicalisation and mobilisation.<sup>134</sup> For Kalantar, his close friendships with Amani and Hadi appear crucial in explaining his mobilisation. Kalantar and Amani are featured prominently in online postings, specifically Instagram, in which Ali refers to them as "brothers since day one" and Mohammed Hadi as a "brother from different mother."<sup>135</sup>

The influence of the imam is yet to be fully understood. Reports from the family at the time suggested that Kalantar had been 'groomed' by the imam, confirming that Kalantar had been spending more time at the Mosque.<sup>136</sup> The full extent of these interactions on Kalantar's desire and decision to travel will probably never be known. However, reports from his family suggest that they did coincide with a change in his behaviour, that he had taken more interest in Islam and began praying regularly. Kalantar had been commenting on and sharing propaganda material for a minimum of six months before finally leaving; that the contact with the imam was only in the final month of this time period strengthens the idea that the relationship may have precipitated Kalantar's decision to make *hijrah*, thus highlighting the importance of offline interactions. Similar relationships with imams have been reported by the families of men from the Cardiff Cluster (involving brothers Aseel and Nasser Muthana, and their friend Reyaad Khan), and for a number of men from West London including Fatlum Shalaku.

### *Ifthekar Jaman: Establishing a Tazkiyyah Network*

One of the most illuminating examples comes from a large cluster of fighters associated with Ifthekar Jaman, a young man from Portsmouth who travelled to Syria in May 2013.<sup>137</sup> The trajectory of his radicalisation is largely typical. Having watched videos on YouTube about the Syrian uprising, Jaman was told by local imams that the conflict was sectarian in nature and therefore not a "true" jihad.<sup>138</sup> Unconvinced, he researched more controversial opinions online

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<sup>133</sup> 'Teen Jihadist Abdullah Elmir groomed like paedophile victim: terrorism expert', Sydney Morning Herald, October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2014, accessed on April 26<sup>th</sup> 2015, at <http://www.smh.com.au/national/teen-jihadist-abdullah-elmir-groomed-like-paedophile-victim-terrorism-expert-20141022-119x0z.html>

<sup>134</sup> Baryalei had links with some of Australia's most notorious foreign fighters, including Mohammed Elomar and Khaled Sharouff.

<sup>135</sup> See Appendix; Figures 22, 23.

<sup>136</sup> Taher (2014)

<sup>137</sup> Maher, S., 'From Portsmouth to Kobane: the British jihadis fighting for Isis,' *New Statesman*, November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2014, accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://www.newstatesman.com/2014/10/portsmouth-kobane>.

<sup>138</sup> Shiraz Maher interview with Ifthekar Jaman, Skype, 2013

and concluded that Shia's were a heretical sect who could not be considered real Muslims.<sup>139</sup> Fighting them was not only permissible, but a duty. He committed himself to travelling to Syria for the sake of jihad.

This was far from straightforward. Jaman lacked contacts and unsuccessfully tried to establish links with fighters from the UK for several months. Indeed, he even reached out to a number of charity and aid convoys that were travelling to the country in the hope they might facilitate his transfer to a jihadist group. He was turned down; his unfamiliarity with existing radical structures in the real world temporarily impeded his plans until Jaman decided to travel to the Syrian border alone and make connections there. Such innovation is generally rare, with the majority of the fighters lacking the strength of character to take such a bold move when still relatively young.

Telling his family he was enrolling on an Arabic course, Jaman flew to Antakya – a small Turkish town close to the Syrian border – and then took a bus to Reyhanli. It was on this journey that Jaman met a man from Aleppo entirely by chance and revealed his desire to wage jihad in Syria. He helped Jaman cross the Syrian border and took him to Aleppo where he had hoped to join Jabhat al-Nusra. "I looked around and I saw them raising the black flag everywhere," Jaman told Shiraz Maher, senior fellow at the ICSR. "People think it's the flag of al-Qaeda but, no, it's the flag of Islam."<sup>140</sup> Once in Aleppo Jaman was taken to a Jabhat al-Nusra recruitment office but was turned away. Again, Jaman's lack of contact with existing radical networks made it difficult for him to win the trust of groups fighting on the ground. No one could provide him with *tazkiyyah* however, and thus his sincerity remained unknown. Despite his best efforts, the lack of *tazkiyyah* meant Jaman was unable to join Jabhat al-Nusra. "I got teary. I was devastated. This is what I'd come for," Jaman said.<sup>141</sup> Islamic State was less concerned with Jaman's status and let him join without a reference. This is characteristic for the group, which has lower barriers to entry than many other militant organisations in Syria.

Jaman used the Internet to maintain regular and intense contact with a group of five friends in Portsmouth to whom he had grown particularly close in the year preceding his migration to Syria: his cousin, Asad Uzzaman; Muhammad Hamidur Rahman; Mamunur Roshid; Mashudur Choudhury; and, Mehdi Hassan. Jaman used Skype and WhatsApp to conduct private discussions with his friends about his experiences in Syria. Jaman encouraged his friends to join him and offered detailed instructions of what clothing to bring, how much money to carry, and logistics for crossing the border. Moreover, Jaman could now offer his friends a smoother and more considered plan for entering territory held by Islamic State by giving them *tazkiyyah*. This is the real significance of the offline peer-to-peer relationship here. By offering his friends a greater degree of information and knowledge, Jaman was able to lower the emotional and psychological barriers to participation. Having arranged *tazkiyyah* for the five Portsmouth men, Jaman gave them highly specific information about where to travel in Turkey in order to meet trusted fixers and transporters who would facilitate their transfer into Syria. In the event, he was even able to arrange for a truck to pick them up near the border.

<sup>139</sup> "This is the duty on me" – exclusive interview with 23-year-old British jihadi in Syria", BBC Newsnight, YouTube, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013, accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPTS-w-c4UQ>.

<sup>140</sup> Shiraz Maher interview with Ifthekar Jaman, Skype, 2013

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. (2013)

Meanwhile, in Manchester, another group of three men – Anil Khalil Raoufi, Mohammed Azzam Javeed, and Abu Qa'qaa (this is his nom de guerre; his real name is unknown) – were also being radicalised, in part, by Jaman's public propaganda. Abu Qa'qaa published a long explanation of his decision to travel to Syria in which he revealed that the group had been closely monitoring events on social media and had grown increasingly angry at the situation. They reconciled themselves to travelling but, much like Jaman, were unsure of how to reach Syria safely. After discussing it amongst themselves, the group were uninspired but decided to "rely on Allah alone," and resolved to make contacts whilst in Turkey. To this end, Qa'qaa admits to having been inspired by the teachings of the al-Qaeda ideologue Anwar al-Awlaki who had told his followers, "hijrah [migration] is like jumping off a cliff and not knowing what to expect at the bottom."

Unbeknown to Qa'qaa, both Raoufi and Javeed had decided not to delay their journey and bought airline tickets to Turkey. Although Qa'qaa did not have enough money for the journey, he was supported by Raoufi and Javeed who paid for his ticket. This incident again demonstrates the importance of peers in enabling their friends when at the tipping point between radicalisation and mobilisation. Once in Turkey the trio began reaching out to fighters in the hope of receiving *tazkiyyah*. It was impossible. Unknown to anyone inside the country, no one was prepared to vouch for them.

When the group contacted Ifthekar Jaman he was similarly unprepared to offer *tazkiyyah* for individuals who were entirely unknown to him, but engineered a plan to help the Manchester trio. He told them to wait in Turkey until his friends from Portsmouth arrived (who, by coincidence, were scheduled to arrive just a few days later). They would meet and vet the Manchester men. If they approved, Jaman would provide them with *tazkiyyah*.

In the event, the Portsmouth cluster was sufficiently reassured by the Manchester trio that they advised Ifthekar Jaman to provide *tazkiyyah*.<sup>142</sup> He did, and days later all the men were taken into Syria. This episode underscores the importance of offline interactions when winning trust because of the potential for ambiguity when solely interacting with others online. For the Manchester cluster this was vital and a necessary precursor to their arrival in Syria.

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<sup>142</sup> See Appendix; Figure 24

## Conclusion – Refocusing the Policy Debate

This report has attempted to provide a more nuanced understanding of the recruitment of British nationals to the 'Islamic State.' It has had two related objectives; to make clear the distinctions between radicalisation and recruitment with reference to the desires, decisions and actions of the recruit; and to provide a more nuanced understanding of the influence of the Internet on the mobilisation process as a whole. Without such distinctions, the investigations into the serious and complex issue of preventing foreign fighter recruitment devolves into misunderstandings that not only affect academic accuracy but, as has been highlighted, public policy.

The 'Internet causality' narrative has heavily affected the debate regarding the roles and responsibilities of governments and Internet companies. The narrative is at the heart of a conundrum, summarised by former Google executive Andrew McCaughlin in the following way:

*““You want to live in a world where people have access to news — in other words, documentary evidence of what is actually happening. And an ISIS video of hostages being beheaded is both an act of propaganda and is itself a fact. And so if you're a platform, you don't want to suppress the facts. On the other hand, you don't want to participate in advancing propaganda. And there is the conundrum.”<sup>143</sup>*

The situation has undoubtedly become more complex since the time of Osama Bin Laden, whose messages were smuggled out of the remote locations they were filmed in and couriered to Al Jazeera. Seeing the Internet as just a platform, even if exaggerated for satirical effect, seems increasingly disingenuous.<sup>144</sup> Even Bin Laden acknowledged this difference, stating in a letter found in his compound that “The wide-scale spread of jihadist ideology, especially on the Internet, and the tremendous number of young people who frequent the Jihadist Web sites [are] a major achievement for jihad.”<sup>145</sup>

If the freedom of speech versus security debate is not being placed in emotive, Orwellian language, it is invariably placed in black and white terms. For Wallace, who argues that Twitter's indirect promotion of violence and calls to violence is the equivalent of providing material support to terrorist organisations, concludes that if Internet companies are not willing to be part of the solution, they are part of the problem.<sup>146</sup> Twitter dissents by arguing that a distinction must be made between platform and content. Colin Crowell, the firm's head of global public policy, claims that the “key thing...is to recognize [Twitter's] role as the provider of this open platform for free expression . . . to recognize that that speech is not our own” and that a duty to respect and to defend those voices on the platform,” is crucial. “The platform of any debate is neutral. The platform doesn't take sides.”<sup>147</sup> The issue can be simplified down to philosophical and

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<sup>143</sup> Higham, S., Nakashima, E., 'Why the Islamic State leaves tech companies torn between free speech and security,' *The Washington Post*, July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015, accessed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/islamic-states-embrace-of-social-media-puts-tech-companies-in-a-bind/2015/07/15/0e5624c4-169c-11e5-89f3-61410da94eb1\\_story.html?postshare=7731437061049526](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/islamic-states-embrace-of-social-media-puts-tech-companies-in-a-bind/2015/07/15/0e5624c4-169c-11e5-89f3-61410da94eb1_story.html?postshare=7731437061049526)

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. (2015)

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. (2015)

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. (2015)

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. (2015)



practical considerations; first, should Internet companies curb the free speech of individuals by removing content? If yes, to what extent it is feasible to do so?

The problems with framing the issue in this way are profound, however. First, nobody wins; this report has illustrated that keeping the material online will undoubtedly have an effect on recruits, yet taking it down is also flawed. Not only is the process of removing Twitter accounts only marginally effective in reducing the overall noise of jihadist activity, it is not resource efficient while preventing concerned parties such as governments, academics and security analysts from learning about the conflict and studying its broader trends.<sup>148</sup>

While this report has highlighted the importance of this debate, the Internet's limitations have also been illustrated, with offline dynamics appearing crucial in the actual physical movement to the region. The Internet debate, while important, appears increasingly abstract and detached from the reality of how the mobilisation process works. Some of the attention must be refocused, then, on the traditional factors and mechanisms of mobilisation that exist in society rather than online.

Extremism, both its acts and ideas, can only be countered with civic engagement. As Nemr notes, facts don't matter to extremists.<sup>149</sup> Unpalatable ideas need to be made marginalised and made taboo for them not take root and spread, and this requires a civic, values based approach. Grassroots campaigns that take a holistic approach to countering extremism, that have a granular understanding of the dynamics on a local level, need to be empowered. An example would be the Active Change Foundation, based in East London. Started by Hanif Qadir, an ex-radical who fought in Afghanistan at the start of the 'War on Terror', the organisation has had great success in ingraining ideas of civic responsibility and positive values, such as leadership, in young people. The programmes they offer help those participating in learning valuable life skills, but also become a hub of values that slowly disseminate into the community at large. The success of these programs relies on trust, which needs time to build. The crisis in the Middle East, and thus the steady flow of radicalised migrants travelling to the region, shows no sign of abating. Unless governments take a proactive approach, the physical and political repercussions could be drastic.

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<sup>148</sup> See Berger, J.M., Morgan, J., 'ISIS Twitter Census', *The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World*, No, 20, March 2015.

<sup>149</sup> Nemr (2015).

## Allen, Juliet (PS/SP)

**From:** Lively, Cassandra  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 23, 2015 9:02 AM  
**To:** Kubicek, Brett  
**Subject:** RE: Kings College Deliverables  
**Attachments:** Re: Follow-up on Today's Call - Kings College London; RE: Follow-up on Today's Call - Kings College London

No problem!

My notes basically reiterate what is in the first email above, and I've also included your reply to Shiraz re: restricted briefing paper:

"One thing to keep in mind, with this kind of change, is not to double-count work for the online/offline paper with that for the restricted briefing paper".

In the first email you'll see what they committed to completing in the "extension document" word document.

---

**From:** Kubicek, Brett  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 23, 2015 8:53 AM  
**To:** Lively, Cassandra  
**Subject:** RE: Kings College Deliverables

Thanks! Do you have notes from our Feb. 23 call with Shiraz on this stuff, or an email where one of us confirmed the status of the restricted briefing paper? My notes are that I'd review their Ottawa paper and get back to them to determine if it met the commitment, and I'm pretty sure I said it was too limited to be considered equivalent to a 5000 word paper. I'm trying to track that down, but if you have it handy, please let me know.

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**From:** Lively, Cassandra  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 23, 2015 8:45 AM  
**To:** Kubicek, Brett  
**Subject:** Kings College Deliverables

Deliverable	Clientele	Outputs	Date
Public Briefing paper "Western foreign fighters/Syria"	Government officials, academics, media	5,000 word paper to be published and disseminated by ICSR	March 2014
	Canadian government officials	5,000 word paper produced exclusively for Canadian government	May 2015
Online resource "Foreign fighters/Syria"	Government officials, academics, media	Searchable section of ICSR website, to be maintained throughout the project's duration	June 2015

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Research monograph "Syrian Militant Movements"	General public, government officials, academics, media	75,000 word monograph to be published by major academic publisher	Draft to be completed by June 2015
Workshops and briefings on Syria in Ottawa, Canada	Government officials, academics, media	Minimum of half a dozen meetings with presentation and discussion of key findings	March 2015
Paper on the interplay between online and 'real world' radicalization	General public, government officials, academics, media	10,000 word edited publication,	May 2015
Paper on the 'facilitation' network in Turkey	General public, government officials, academics, media	10,000 word edited publication	May 2015

***Cassandra Lively, MPA***

Project Manager | Gestionnaire de projet

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## Allen, Juliet (PS/SP)

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**From:** Kubicek, Brett  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 11, 2015 4:20 PM  
**To:** 'Shiraz Maher'; Lively, Cassandra  
**Cc:** 'Partington, Neil'; Martin, Connie  
**Subject:** RE: Follow-up on Today's Call - Kings College London

Thank you for this Shiraz - I think the assumption was that you could do a special journal issue without a conference (and there are ways, of course), but I'm good with the idea of subbing additional papers by the ICSR team instead, especially if they are of similar scale/effort – which seems to be the case.

We do need to make the case for approval here (my authority only goes so far!), and we may have some further questions (e.g. level of effort). But it should be short and relatively straightforward.

One thing to keep in mind, with this kind of change, is not to double-count work for the online/offline paper with that for the restricted briefing paper.

As well, I'm good with the new dates mentioned, though note that monograph does not need to be published for you to complete that task. "All" we would need is to see the manuscript. So that might shorten the timeframe. Please let us know if so.

Note, however, that in putting off the dates this will raise a question here about the gap between us paying for effort and the delivery of products.

It's not a problem, but does require a little extra detail. Namely, if you are doing significant work after March (e.g. on your own time), this should be reflected in the budget as an in-kind contribution.

We will work with you on this, and it should be simple, but we should aim to do this all at once.

Finally, while at it, a quick question about the activity report (which looks great!) – are all the items listed directly linked to work we've funded, or are some more in the realm of just relevant?

For example, the BBC study's approach to data gathering and analysis looked relevant but separate. But if you have a direct link to make, that is definitely good to know. Lots of interest here these days about evidence of impact, so keeping the line between relevant and linked is helpful – if there is one, that is!

Thanks again.

All best,  
Brett.

**Brett Kubicek, PhD**

Manager, Research and Academic Relations | Gestionnaire, Recherche et relations académiques  
Portfolio Affairs and Communications Branch | Secteur des affaires du portefeuille et des communications  
**Public Safety Canada | Sécurité publique Canada**  
Tel: 613.991.7779 | Fax: 613.954.3131 | [brett.kubicek@ps-sp.gc.ca](mailto:brett.kubicek@ps-sp.gc.ca)

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**From:** Shiraz Maher [mailto: ]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 11, 2015 1:38 PM  
**To:** Lively, Cassandra

**Cc:** Partington, Neil; Kubicek, Brett; Martin, Connie  
**Subject:** Re: Follow-up on Today's Call - Kings College London

Hello all, sorry, getting sign-off has been like trying to juggle water. I attach two documents - Cassandra, can you please let me know what, if anything, further you require (I feel like I'm missing something).

On 23 February 2015 at 21:57, Lively, Cassandra <[Cassandra.Lively@ps-sp.gc.ca](mailto:Cassandra.Lively@ps-sp.gc.ca)> wrote:

Hello Shiraz,

It was very nice to meet you via telephone today!

As requested, below you will find the information we'll need to issue your 2014-15 funds, and address amending your agreement:

1- An Activity Report covering the period October 1, 2013 – December 31, 2014. This report does not need to be anything fancy, but must include the following info:

- A brief description of events related to the Project during the period covered by the report;
- The activities completed and results obtained with respect to the objectives of the project;
- Successes and difficulties encountered by project staff in achieving the objectives of the Project; and
- A brief description of the activities to be completed after your activity report, and any expected changes to your project's work plan. (This is taken from section C1, in Annex C of your original agreement).

2- On the financial side of things, we need to know if you expect to expend the total Public Safety Canada contribution to your project for the 2014-15 fiscal year, before March 31, 2015 (\$136,561). If you do expect to spend all of this money, and may require additional funds to fulfill the objectives of your project, please let us know and we can explore the possibility of amending your agreement to provide additional funds. Or, if you will be unable to expend all of the money, we could explore the possibility of moving those funds into the next fiscal year, and amending your agreement to extend the duration.

3- Either way, we need to update the deliverables table in your original contribution agreement (attached for easy reference above, and I've also attached the previous amendment to your project budget). Our finance folks will not allow us to release payment if a deliverable has not been completed before the end date listed in Annex A, in the project work plan. I've copied and pasted the table below, if you could propose any necessary changes in wording and completion dates, that would be great. Please feel free to do this as a reply to this email, and highlight any changes in a different font color ☺ Brett will get back to us on the restricted briefing paper issues as soon as possible.

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## Project Description/Work Plan:

Deliverable	Clientele	Outputs	Date
Public Briefing paper "Western foreign fighters/Syria"	Government officials, academics, media	5,000 word paper to be published and disseminated by ICSR	03/14
	Canadian government officials	5,000 word paper produced exclusively for Canadian government	06/14
Online resource "Foreign fighters/Syria"	Government officials, academics, media	Searchable section of ICSR website, to be maintained throughout the project's duration	07/14
Research monograph "Syrian Militant Movements"	General public, government officials, academics, media	75,000 word monograph to be published by major academic publisher	12/14
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Special journal issue	General public, government officials, academics, media	20,000 word edited conference publication, or special issue of Democracy and Security	03/15

I think that covers everything, please let me know if you have any questions about any of this.

Thank you for your time,

*Cassandra Lively, MPA*

Project Manager | Gestionnaire de projet

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**Allen, Juliet (PS/SP)**

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**Sent:** Wednesday, March 11, 2015 1:38 PM  
**To:** Lively, Cassandra  
**Cc:** Partington, Neil; Kubicek, Brett; Martin, Connie  
**Subject:** Re: Follow-up on Today's Call - Kings College London  
**Attachments:** Canada activity update.docx; Canada Extension Document 1.docx

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